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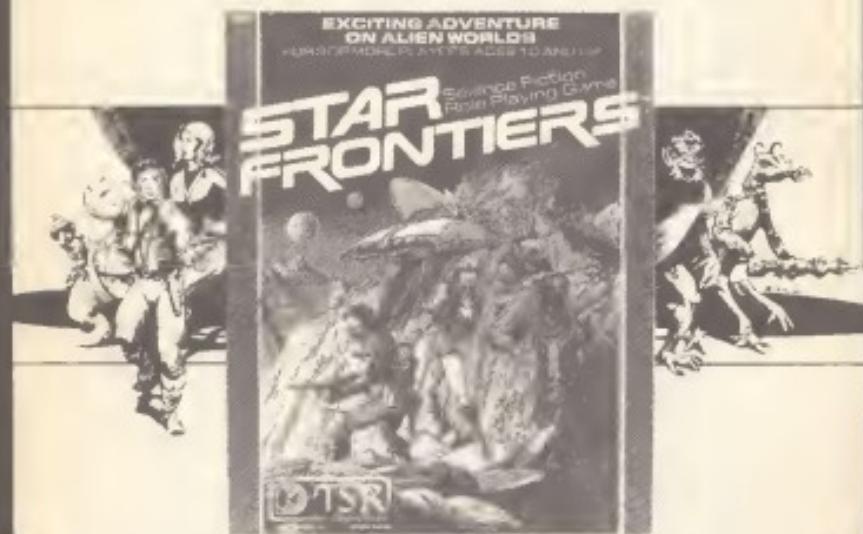
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for "Deep Song"

DEPARTMENTS:	Opinion: Robert Silverberg	4
	Book Reviews:	
	Frank Catalano & Robert Coulson	7
	Discussions: The Readers	18
	The Observatory: George H. Scithers	124
FICTION:	"The Great Secret": Andrew M. Greeley	24
	"Duty to the Empire": Rory Harper	48
	"Pine Castle": R. A. Lafferty	83
	"Il Bacio (Il Chiave)": Tanith Lee	87
	"A Prince of Snobs": Arthur Pendennis	102
	"Blue Fox and Werewolf": Eric G. Iverson	118
	"Deep Song": Reginald Bretnor	126
FACT:	"Beyond Einstein: The Search for the Supertheory of Quantum Gravity": Steve Aaronson	39
	An Interview with R. A. Lafferty: Darrell Schwitzer	75
POETRY:	Wendy McElroy, p38; Robert Frazier, p123; Tom Disch, p162	
CARTOON:	William Rotsler & Alexi Glliland , pp 47 & 82	

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opinion

Robert Silverberg

There has been much talk, in this era of energy crises and heightened sensitivity to environmental problems, of the development of renewable-energy resources as an alternative to the use of fossil fuels. But a report released in the closing days of 1982 will surely create some somber second thoughts among the supporters of these energy alternatives. Among its conclusions were these:

Biomass energy production — the burning of wood and animal wastes — could, if improperly managed, bring about air pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, and the disruption of wildlife habitats.

The large-scale development of geothermal energy sources might release toxic gases, cause earthquakes, and create water shortages.

Further damming of rivers for hydroelectric power removes valuable land from cultivation, fosters silt buildups, and causes soil erosion and stagnation of streams.

Large-scale use of windmills for power generation may cause noise pollution and could interfere with transmission of radio, television, and microwave signals.

Oceanic thermal energy conversion — the exploitation of temperature differentials between ocean

surfaces and deep water to produce electricity — might disrupt marine life cycles and cause weather changes by altering ocean currents.

The manufacture of solar photovoltaic cells will create troublesome shortages of such substances as cadmium and gallium, and the deployment of such cells in great quantity will consume large areas of land.

The interesting — and depressing — thing about this report is that it is *not* the privately sponsored product of some large oil company or any of the other corporations generally regarded as villains in popular energy-crisis mythology. No, this litany of sobering observations was released by the National Science Foundation; and the organization that conducted the study was one of our major environmental groups, the Audubon Society. I suspect that not even in the farthest-out fringes of the alternative-energy movement is there anyone who thinks that the Audubon Society is in the pay of Mobil Oil or the sinister nuclear-energy tycoons.

Of course, the renewable-energy technologies that the National Science Foundation's report urges us to regard with such caution are

currently on the back burner anyway. Several virtually simultaneous and interrelated developments have recently created a notable oversupply of oil and natural gas. OPEC, by imposing huge price increases on those fuels in the past decade and largely making them stick, so enhanced the profitability of finding and producing oil and gas that enormous new supplies came on the market; but the same price increases sent the economies of the industrialized nations into such prolonged slumps that consumption of oil and gas has fallen precipitously — which is now starting to bring down the price, but not to anything like the pre-OPEC levels.

With such things going on, the motivation for developing new energy technologies is weakening. Shell Oil, which had been working on cadmium sulfide solar cells, now says that its "revised time frame" for mass production of the cells "is apt to be longer than expected." RCA finds itself unable to locate outside financing for its unique "thin film" photovoltaic device. An entrepreneur who hoped to build giant "wind farms" of windmills in California and Hawaii is having similar financial troubles. And so on.

But economic slumps don't last forever, and underconsumption caused by overpricing is eventually corrected by price reductions: which is why it's folly to think that the present glut of fossil fuels is anything but a short-term phenomenon. The supply of those fuels is

just as finite as ever, and mankind's need for energy, plotted on a curve extending — one hopes — through millions of years, is infinite. Sooner or later, we're going to need those alternative energy sources.

What, though, of the Audubon Society's warning? Dare we build all those windmills, if they're going to foul up Channel Nine? Can we risk tapping geothermal energy if it's going to unleash the San Andreas Fault?

The answer, of course, is that we'll need to move cautiously and think through the consequences of whatever steps we take. But the real significance of the National Science Foundation's energy study, I think, lies deeper than mere consideration of this or that specific energy-generation problem. The underlying truth arising from that report is this:

ALL forms of energy production have an environmental price. Or, as Robert A. Heinlein put it, There Ain't No Such Thing as a Free Lunch.

The opponents of nuclear-energy power generation — I am not one, incidentally — have so effectively blocked all nuclear power plants in the United States that there has been a resurgence of coal-burning generation, previously deemed obsolete. Coal, unlike oil and gas, will be plentiful in the United States for centuries; the trouble is that we seem to be having a bothersome increase in the acid-rain phenomenon as a consequence of burning all that coal. Acid rain is harmful stuff. It may actually turn out to be more harmful, in the long

run, than anything those nuclear power plants might have done to us. I suspect that before long, as awareness of the acid-rain menace grows, the same citizens who brought down the nuclear power industry will be out there demonstrating against the coal-burning plants, and calling for solar technology, biomass conversion, and all those other science-fictiony things that — oh, my! — the National Science Foundation is suddenly warning us about.

The lesson is clear enough to me. Not even the starriest-eyed Sierra Club member is apt to propose that we roll back our civilization to the level that obtained before Thomas Edison and Henry Ford. (Where would we stable all the horses? What about the problem of manure disposal? How could today's reduced whale population keep all

our lamps burning, and what would Greenpeace say about that, anyway?) We *do* need electrical energy, lots of it, and we *do* have to keep those internal-combustion engines combusting, somehow, until their replacements are at hand. And since we are going to continue to produce energy, we must do it in clean and economical ways. But it is absolute folly to think that we can run an industrial society of billions of people without paying some sort of environmental price for our energy. And it is unwise to let ourselves be so blinded by emotion — by the fear and hysteria, for example, that have throttled the nuclear-power industry in this country — that we fail to understand that there is no free lunch, that risk confronts us *wherever* we turn for our energy.

Even windmills. ☀

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Some years back, a well-known pain reliever had a series of commercials listing various kinds of headaches brought on by various kinds of situations.

Allow me to introduce you to Reviewer's Headache #303. It is the set book.

I call it the set book because "series book" doesn't quite cut it as a description. Series implies open-ended; by "set" I mean things like trilogies, tetralogies, and so on that are complete in several volumes. It doesn't do a damn bit of good railing against the set or, for that matter, series books: going back to my column of May 1983, I repeat that these things make good economic sense for both writers and publishers.

The need for a large quantity of cure-all comes about when you try to read them to review them. If you think of a set book as one big novel in several volumes, odds are you're going to have a volume or two which, while weak on its own, is very good as a contribution to the whole set.

Unfortunately, that kind of evaluation usually comes in retrospect, and I can't think of much that can be done about it. You can read the set all at one sitting and review it as such, but then you run the risk of not having a book to talk about when everyone else is raving about it. But the piecemeal approach has other pitfalls, too, such as forgetting sometimes vital bits of plot and character.

In my mind ultimately the best set book is the kind that stands up well

on its own, while forming an integral part of a story that can't be told in one volume. That's difficult, and even the best of writers can't always succeed in such a task.

Barring such a perfect world, perhaps the best solution is for reviewers to evaluate each book singly . . . and then you go out and buy them in one clump and read them one immediately after the other. Or make the publishers happy and buy them as they're reviewed — but no matter how you do it, you're most likely to get the best reading experience and the best feeling for the continuity and nuances of a set if you read it all at once.

There is at least one saving grace when it comes to set books. They do make very nice boxed gifts.

White Gold Wielder

by Stephen R. Donaldson
Del Rey: \$14.95 (cloth)

At this point let me pause to dig out a copy of the January '83 *Amazing*. Let me see, ah, in reference to *The One Tree*, "I'd like to think I'm not the only person getting fed up with Donaldson's *THE SECOND CHRONICLES OF THOMAS COVENANT* . . . It's going to take an incredibly good third volume to get these second *CHRONICLES* to match the intensity of the first three books."

Okay. Donaldson has done it.

White Gold Wielder pulls the second trilogy out of the fire. It's everything I criticized *The One Tree*

for not being — something different from the first volume in the second trilogy.

Some background: Thomas Covenant, whom Donaldson wrote about in an earlier trilogy, is a writer who's also a leper. He sometimes is transported to this place known only as The Land, where his white gold wedding band lets him use the wild magic. Covenant isn't thrilled about any of this, and in the first trilogy pretty much waltzes through it not believing that any of it is more than a hallucination.

In the second trilogy, Covenant is called back to The Land. This time The Land has been laid nearly waste by the same person he thought he'd defeated in the first three books, Lord Foul. And Covenant hasn't gone to The Land unaided this time around: Dr. Linden Avery has come with him from the so-called real world, and she's a woman who has trouble coming to terms with her life-saving abilities in the dying Land.

What infuriated me with *The One Tree* is that the book ends with just about no change in the characters or the situation.

But in *White Gold Wielder*, we are treated to a number of changes that keep the plot moving and the reader interested. Finally, Avery and Covenant quit whining about their respective conditions long enough to actually do something. They head to Lord Foul's lair, and there is the expected final confrontation with Lord Foul, who turns out to be a different villain than he appeared to be in the first trilogy. Most importantly, Avery and Covenant grow as people, and that's where the book's strength lies.

White Gold Wielder is an excellent end to the second trilogy. There is some wordy description, and occa-

sionally the lead characters wallow in their familiar self-pity. But it is up to the sense of innovation in the first book of the second trilogy, and brings that trilogy to a very satisfying close.

The Steel of Raithskar

by Randall Garrett &

Vicki Ann Heydron

Bantam: \$2.25 (paper)

The Glass of Dyskornis

by Randall Garrett &

Vicki Ann Heydron

Bantam: \$2.50 (paper)

The Bronze of Eddarta

by Randall Garrett &

Vicki Ann Heydron

Bantam: \$2.95 (paper)

A trilogy of a different kind is Garrett's and Heydron's *THE GANDALARA CYCLE*. At least, I think it's a trilogy. It's actually more similar to a series than to something like the Donaldson books, because it leaves so much open-ended.

The *CYCLE* does share a few things with Donaldson's works: it deals with a man who is transported to a strange land and doesn't know how he got there, who is seen as an incarnation of a great hero by some, and who has unusual powers because he's not of that world. That's about where the similarity ends. For while the Donaldson books are close to high fantasy, the Garrett and Heydron books are closer to SF adventure with a dash of fantasy thrown in.

Ricardo Carillo wakes up on a strange desert after seeing a fireball approach the cruise ship he's on in contemporary times. He discovers he's young again, no longer terminally ill — and in someone else's body who is nearly human. After a short while, he finds the body is that of the son of a leader in that area, he has a rare giant telepathic cat that he

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Amazing:

January 1981. Harlan Ellison, Robert Silverberg, Alan Ryan; Stanislaw Lem interview.

March 1981 is sold out!

May 1981. "The Vampire of Mallworld" by Somtow Sucharitkul; George R.R. Martin, Lisa Tuttle, Gregory Benford, Marvin Kaye.

July 1981 is sold out!

September 1981. Roger Zelazny, Ron Goulart, Bill Pronzini, Harlan Ellison, Barry Malzberg; Gene Wolfe interview.

November 1981. "The Last Line of the Haiku" by Somtow Sucharitkul; Marvin Kaye, Parke Godwin, Jack Wodhams, Orson Scott Card; Algis Budrys interview.

January 1982. "Unsound Variations" by George R.R. Martin; Theodore Sturgeon, Manly Wade Wellman; Lloyd Biggle interview.

March 1982. "The Cheese Stands Alone" by Harlan Ellison; "Moon of Ice" by Brad Linaweaver; Barry Malzberg; A.E. van Vogt interview.

June 1982. "The Story of a Dädar" by Darrell Schweitzer; Charles L. Grant, David Bunch, Wayne Wightman; Asimov classic reprint; Grant interview.

September 1982. Marvin Kaye, Parke Godwin, Alan Ryan, David Bunch, George Alec Effinger; Michael Shaara interview.

November 1982. The first Scithers issue! Michael Whelan cover. Long fiction by Jack Williamson, Larry Niven, Robert Silverberg; short stories by Gene Wolfe, John M. Ford, Nancy Springer; Silverberg's "Opinion"; Ford's games column.

January 1983. Kelly Freas cover; "Aquila Meets Bigfoot" by Somtow Sucharitkul; novelet by Poul Anderson; stories by Tanith Lee, Jack C. Haldeman, Michael McCollum, etc.; Avram Davidson Adventures in Unhistory; Silverberg.

March 1983. Jack Gaughan cover; part I of *Against Infinity* by Gregory Benford; Bill Pronzini, Darrell Schweitzer, Sharon Webb, Damien Broderick; poetry by Thomas Disch; "The Amazing Years" by Cele Goldsmith Lalli; A. Bertram Chandler interview.

May 1983. Kelly Freas cover; *Against Infinity* by Gregory Benford concluded; "Aquila: The Final Conflict" by Somtow Sucharitkul; Gene Wolfe, Alan Dean Foster, William Wu; features by Silverberg, Ford, Catalano, Coulson.

Fantastic:

January 1980. "The Cliffhanger Sound" by Paul Dellinger; "Never Argue With Antique Dealers" by Darrell Schweitzer; a classic reprint by Murray Leinster; analysis of TV adaptions of Ray Bradbury.

April and July 1980 are sold out!

October 1980. "The Amorous Umbrella" by Marvin Kaye; Darrell Schweitzer, Wayne Wightman, Tom Easton, M. Lindholm.

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can ride, and he has a quest.

For it turns out that the body Carillo inhabits is that of a man freshly dead, a man on the run who's accused of murder and of the theft of a powerful, sacred gemstone. His quest — to clear his name and his father's name, and to find the gemstone and take it back to the rightful government caretakers.

THE GANDALARA CYCLE is hard to classify as SF or fantasy in that some very good explanations, or rather rationalizations, are given by the characters to explain what goes on. But the feel of the books is not too different from that of an updated Arabian Nights fantasy, complete with swordplay and a desert world.

It is, however, a lot of fun. And the writers have included something I find to be a rather neat narrative device: the "What Has Gone Before"-type sections at the beginning of each book don't just refresh the reader's memory, but also form an integral part of the plot. It's a nice change.

Unfortunately, where I was hoping for all the loose ends to be wrapped up in the third book, I was disappointed. It turns out six more volumes are planned in this extended *CYCLE*. So while the original quest plotline is wrapped up, some larger questions — such as how in the world Carillo got where he is — are left unanswered.

But it's still enjoyable, if not thoroughly curiosity-quenching.

Millennium

by John Varley

Berkley: \$6.95 (trade paperback)

Generally, when a writer embarks on a set book, that's all the writer produces in novel-length work until the set is complete. So, all things

being equal, this column should be reviewing *Demon*, the long-awaited final chapter in the trilogy that began with *Titan* and *Wizard*.

Fat chance. But what's come out between volumes two and three of Varley's trilogy is no disappointment.

Millennium is the book that came out of the screenplay adaptation of Varley's short story, "Air Raid." That is to say, there was another novel hiding in that short story, as Varley apparently discovered when he was doing the movie version.

And it's a doozy.

We're in the very near future: say, no more than ten years from now. A DC-10 and a 747 collide, leaving more than 600 people crispy critters. One Bill Smith, investigator for the National Transportation Safety Board, is brought in to figure out what the Hell happened.

We're in the very far future: say, 50,000 years from now. Snatch Team leader Louise Baltimore heads a group of people who go to the past on a regular basis, sending those who would be in moments dead meat back from disasters where no one survives. In that time, anyway. And one of her team projects is the DC-10/747 crash.

Then throw in a wonky — a time anomaly that could upset the balance of the entire timeline and wipe out an awful lot of universe.

That's the basic set-up for *Millennium*. I would have read the whole thing in one sitting, had not there been eight hours of sleep sandwiched in there. Varley's prose is crisp, spare, and with the page-turning abilities of a thriller. It keeps your attention.

It also handles a very contemporary situation and a very science-fictiony one without jarring you.

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Moon Called

She is rejected
by her people, yet chosen of the Moon.
He is the godlike one, bearer of the true sword.
Together they must descend into hell and
there confront the forces of ultimate darkness.

"Andre Norton is a superb
storyteller with a narrative pace all her own."
—*The New York Times*

"One of the most popular writers of our time."
—*Publishers Weekly*

It does have its problems, but they're not major. For one, the solution to the final problem smacks of being pulled out of thin air. And there's an overly significant second epilogue that takes the novel away from being a fine bit of fast-paced SF and tries to turn it into something metaphysical. It doesn't ring true, but it doesn't spoil the book, either.

All in all, it's a fine in-between-trilogy-books snack for even the most demanding fan of Varley's.

Orion Shall Rise

by Poul Anderson

Timescape: \$16.95 (cloth), \$7.95
(trade paperback)

It has been said about Poul Anderson that he cannot write a dull word. I can't say if that's true, having not read every word he's written, but the comment gains new validity with Anderson's latest effort.

Orion Shall Rise may not go down in the annals of science fiction as a great book, but it is a good one. Anderson has taken his gift of being able to draw complex yet easily understood characters and spread it over epic proportions: the scene is Earth hundreds of years from now, after a nuclear war. There are three major political powers, and a number of minor ones. The majors — the Maurai Federation, the Domain of Skyholm, and the Northwest Union — find themselves in a web of intrigue surrounding someone who is scavenging fissionables. The Maurai fear whoever is doing it will start producing nuclear weapons again, and the Federation swears to stop him at all costs.

The title's hidden message may not come as much of a surprise to anyone familiar with early space exploration plans. At least, it didn't to me. But

Anderson takes the plot past the ho-hum revelation of what the title means (Reviewer's Golden Rule #1: Don't Give away Plot Twists and Corollary #1: Even Obvious Ones) and instead focuses on what is done with that project.

The book occasionally reminds me of Larry Niven's and Jerry Pournelle's *Lucifer's Hammer*, only because some of the characters get worked up about the benefits and evils of nuclear technology. In that sense, *Orion Shall Rise* is a novel of the 1980s. But, even with nearly 500 pages, *Orion Shall Rise* moves smoothly and keeps your attention to the end.

Mindkiller

by Spider Robinson

Holt, Rinehart and Winston: \$14.50
(cloth)

Mindkiller is science fiction, but it's not being marketed as such. It's being called "a novel of the near future" in the vein of those so-called techno-thrillers I've mentioned before, with contemporary characters, contemporary situations, and a scientific gimmick, usually evil, usually medical. *Mindkiller* has elements of all of these.

But *Mindkiller* transcends the techno-thriller category by using the scientific element as more than a plot gimmick. I don't know if I can define it in words, but it's the difference between a kid taking a frog into a show-and-tell class and knowing exactly how that frog functions.

Robinson knows his frogs. In this case, the frog is wire-heading, in which people can plug the pleasure center of their brain into electrical outlets and experience an incredible high.

Robinson follows two time lines, in



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1994 and 1999, in two locations, Halifax, Nova Scotia and New York City. In 1994, English Professor Norman Kent attempts suicide . . . and is saved by a mugger. But the rest of his life is falling apart. In 1999, Joe Templeton is legally a non-person, and an excellent burglar. On one trip out of his hidden apartment,

he saves the life of a wirehead committing suicide. The time lines are drawn together to make a whole greater than its parts.

The novel is a thriller and science-fiction book all rolled into one fast-paced package, and it's not a mindless one. It's a good read, with some excellent character twists.

by Robert Coulson

The Castle of the Otter

by Gene Wolfe

Ziesing Brothers, \$16.95 (hardcover)

This book had a short print run; the publisher is already sold out, but individual retailers may still have copies. And there are always reprints, if enough people want them.

It's a non-fiction book about Gene's serial novel *BOOK OF THE NEW SUN*; how he came to write it, a treatise on the use of cavalry in his technological world, an article about the names used, a dictionary of the more unusual words encountered in the volume, quotes of a few reviews, and some comments on writing in general. I was appalled to read that people have been asking Gene which words in *BOOK OF THE NEW SUN* were real and which he made up. I admit to not having known the precise meaning of many of the obscure words, but there weren't that many that I hadn't heard of. Another illusion — that science-fiction readers are more literate than the general populace — shattered.

Quite well and entertainingly done, and should be of interest to anyone who wonders how stories come about, or who just enjoys seeing Gene Wolfe put words together. Besides, anyone who compares me to Jack the Ripper

deserves your support.

Navigator's Sindrome

by Jayge Carr

Doubleday, \$11.95 (hardcover)

This one contains everything that a good space opera should have. There is a woman — the Navigator of the title — who is lusted after by the foul lord of an evil society, there is the hard-bitten spacer captain stuck in an unfriendly and dangerous port, there is the oily but vicious pimp, the honest cop who turns against his crooked masters; there is even the cold-eyed drug addict who, we suspect from the start, will eventually become the Key to Success. Plus various other subplots and minor characters. Somehow, Carr brings everything together into an entertaining story and makes the characters believable. The Navigator even turns out to be as competent as the author tells you she is. Not precisely serious literature, but it's great fun to read, which is more important.

A Rumor of Angels

By M. Bradley Kellogg

Signet, \$2.50 (paperback)

Culture shock with a vengeance. Some Earth scientist has waved a magic wand and opened a path to an

alternate world in which humans have evolved somewhat differently. There is a mysterious Force surrounding the valley into which the Earthmen emerge; the story chronicles an attempt to penetrate it, along with an attempt at a Final Solution to the Earthman problem made by the natives and a renegade Earthman. (The Earthmen, with a few exceptions including the heroine, are the bad guys.) The author is good enough to make a somewhat hackneyed plot entertaining while you're reading it. Parts of it are a shade saccharine, but it's an acceptable time-waster.

The Shadow of the Ship

by Robert Wilfred Franson
Del Rey, \$2.75 (paperback)

This one gets an "A" for having the most original background I've encountered in years: not always believable, but original. Our hero is the captain of an interstellar wagon train. Humans in this rather back-water area of the Galaxy travel from planet to planet in airtight coaches drawn across the surface of subspace by alien beasties, following glowing — and unexplained — "trails." The hero is actually from an Earth-based starship culture; at some time in the past he and an alien buddy have been marooned for unspecified reasons on a planet touched by one of the trails, and rescued by a woman drover who is now his mistress. He also has all sorts of futuristic abilities not shared by the locals, or by the reader, for that matter. As the book opens, he is leading his wagon train out on an unexplored trail because of the rumor of an unidentified stranded object somewhere yonder. The object is the shadow of a starship — yes, a three-dimensional shadow — and various factions clash over various causes

while it's being examined. This is blurbed as the first volume of a series, and there are enough unexplained items in here to provide material for several future books. Technically the writing is acceptable if not great, and the concept of an oxcart to the stars makes it worth reading, whether it moves you to awe or laughter or both.

On the Good Ship Enterprise

by Bjo Trimble
Starblaze, \$5.95 (trade paperback)

Bjo's account of her years in Star Trek fandom, and her association with the TV show, both movies, and the ST souvenir mart, Lincoln Enterprises. Fifteen years of it. (And I recall having worried about her wasting her time on such an ephemeral pursuit as ST fandom; goes to show what sort of prophet I am.) It's strictly a personal account, and will undoubtedly be of most interest to ST fans and Bjo's friends, though it should also be quite fascinating to the general public as an insider's account of a Hollywood phenomenon. Quite possibly science-fiction fans will have less interest in it than the general public does, but there is a mine of media information mixed in with the humor and reminiscences. And there are oddball accounts, such as the psychiatrist's comment that fandom is saner than the rest of the world. (Of course, we always knew it, but psychiatrists didn't.) Photos included will be mostly of interest to ST fans, though the one of Kathy Bushman should interest any male above the age of 6.

The Great Steamboat Race

by John Brunner
Ballantine, \$7.95 (trade paperback)

This is a historical novel, without a

trace of science fiction or fantasy. So why review it? Well, nobody reads science fiction exclusively — I hope — and Brunner is “one of ours” and could use support in mainstream ventures, and it’s a better novel than any of the science fiction this round. The inspiration for the book was the celebrated race between the *Natchez* and the *Robert E. Lee*, but since Brunner has changed the names of the boats and people, the events leading up to the race, the course of the race itself, and its conclusion, the results are pure fiction. There is a rivalry engendered by the Civil War, increased by the gambling fever of the postwar period, and eventually encompassing the personnel of both boats, the families of some of them, and even some of the passengers. There are several intertwined stories in the book’s 560 pages; if there is a single hero, it’s Fernand Lamenthe, the Creole who is repudiated by his family for becoming a riverboat pilot instead of a bank clerk, and scorned by the other pilots as a “nigger.” But the book abounds in interesting characters: the voodoo priestesses whose rivalry is in the end settled by the race, the blind captain Miles Parbury, Cherouen, the “electric doctor” who is a charlatan and believes firmly in the wonders of modern science, and Hosca Drew, the stubbornly self-righteous owner-captain. The spirit of the book is the one expounded by the ex-slave, Caesar Predulac: that in the end you can’t rely on governments, religions, or gimmicks, but only on yourself. Which is at least part of my reason for liking the book; the rest is because I could like and believe in the characters.

The Dragon of the Ishtar Gate
by L. Sprague de Camp

Starblaze, \$5.95 (trade paperback)

This is another historical novel, though it’s being marketed as swords and sorcery. Since the historical period is that of Xerxes around 475 BC, the action isn’t that far from typical s&s novels, and the characters are typical of de Camp; you just have to remember that some of them were real. Great entertainment if you missed it the first time around — which was 1961. Even if you read it then, the original edition wasn’t embellished by Steve Fabian artwork, so you might want this anyway. It’s a fairly typical “quest” plot, ranging across the Middle East and into Africa; the characters and the wry humor make it entertaining. With luck, Starblaze will reprint some of de Camp’s other historicals from that period.

The Cosmic Dancers
by Amit Goswami, with Maggie Goswami

Harper & Row, \$18.50 (hardcover)

This is subtitled “Exploring the Physics of Science Fiction.” Coverage seems quite complete, from Newton and Einstein to Schrödinger and mysticism; the final chapter is “Mysticism in Science Fiction and the New Physics.” The Goswamis start out each section quite simply and a trifle patronizingly, and work up to the harder propositions. (Possibly it isn’t patronizing; it could be that the authors don’t know how to be humorous, but their lighter touches were not appreciated in this quarter.) Some of it, however, while presumably quite good physics, isn’t as clear as alternate explanations I’ve heard. In a discussion of action and reaction: “That’s why you see debris coming out of the tail of rockets. It’s the backward-heaving debris that gives

the rockets a forward push." I went through too many arguments on "How can rockets work in space where there's nothing to push against?" to really appreciate this method of stating the case, and I suspect that many readers will come away with a very garbled impression of what the Goswamis are saying. Each scientific theory is illustrated by an excerpt from a science-fiction story, and the science in those stories is then re-examined in the light of the theory. It's a quite useful way of explaining physics in a manner understandable to a science-fiction reader, or to an intelligent ten-year-old. A worthwhile book if you read carefully; if you don't, you'll probably get some very strange ideas of both science fiction and physics.

Transmutations

by Alexei Panshin

Elephant Books, Box 999, Dublin,
PA 18917, \$8.00 (trade paperback)

An assortment of novel excerpts, short stories, articles, poetry, essays, and assorted philosophy. I think the philosophy is the reason for the book, though I don't much agree with it, and knew that when I bought it. Yes, reviewers do buy books occasionally, though they try to avoid it. The impression I received was that Alex isn't so much a mystic as he is a

seeker after something to believe in. My own opinion of that subject is given above, so there isn't a lot of room for agreement, but a lot of readers may well find this familiar and inspiring. I find it exasperating; Alex has in the past written excellent material and I wish he'd do it again, instead of chasing after the Meaning of Life as though there was only one.

The Colors of Space

by Marion Zimmer Bradley

Starblaze, \$5.95 (trade paperback)

Another reprint from the 1960s. This is a juvenile and was originally released by a minor paperback publisher named Monarch, which had about the same life-span as the butterfly of the same name. This publisher inflicted one of the worst covers I've ever seen on Marion's inoffensive manuscript, which didn't improve sales, and it's become somewhat of a minor legend among MZB fans. Starblaze has allowed Marion to restore cuts made by Monarch, though it's still a short book, and added a nice cover and interiors by Barbi Johnson. If you expect one of Marion's modern, adult, somewhat feminist novels you'll be disappointed, but it's a quite entertaining juvenile adventure story, which reads more like early Andre Norton than it does like Marion's current output. ☺



Dear Editor,

I'm a new reader of *Amazing* living in Japan, and very pleased for the translation of "Tansu." Hammura Ryo (Ryo Hammura, exactly) is a very popular SF writer in my country, and I'm a member of his supporting (fan) club.

He has already written about 100 books. He likes Abraham Merritt's novels, and one of his books — *Fox Woman* — was written for the purpose of providing a conclusion to one of Merritt's. But his other books are very Japanese. For example, *Self-Defense Force in the Middle Ages* is a story about the Japanese modern army time-slipped into the Shogun Age.

Anyway, thank you for your progressive editorial style. In Japan, two SF magazines are published monthly and one of them contains Japanese writers only. If possible, translate their stories.

Don't be sensitive about cars or electronics. We are importing much science fiction. Famous American SF writers in this Far-Eastern country are Niven, Asimov, Lee, Silverberg, Zelazny, Heinlein, and so on.

Yours sincerely,

Hitoshi Hosoda
1-16, Higashi 3-chome
Toride-shi, Ibaragi-ken
Japan

We would like to see more SF translated into English, Japanese as well as that originally written in other languages.

— Editor

Dear Mr. Alan Dean Foster:

I had to write to tell you my enjoyment at your review ("Wanna

Buy a Duck," *Amazing*, January 1983). First off, I confess to having been one of those aficionados; I was the guy in junior high school who brought the books to school and read aloud to a small lunch-hour "study group"; and as far as I am concerned, the Disney comics of the early '50s taught me more (or to be precise, turned on my mind more) than most of what passed for formal education in those years.

I glanced at the Scrooge McDuck book (which is being sold for \$159.00 in the San Francisco Bay area) and was also impressed, although I did not find therein my personal favorite, wherein Scrooge buys up every 1925 quarter in an effort to make a "rare" coin, then sends the nephews into the Atlantic deeps to recover one sample (where they discover Atlantis) and after securing the "only" remaining quarter, finds that "there is only one geezer" with enough money to pay the \$10 skyrillion price tag (guess who).

Although I never investigated the artist for this series, the time frame would seem to indicate that Barks was the creator of my personal classic in duckdom, a story *sans* Scrooge called "Donald Duck in Old California," which appeared in 1952. This amazing story has Donald and the nephews getting off the L.A. freeways into relics of Old California. An automobile accident and a potion plus dancing administered by some Indians (was Carlos Casteneda there?) send the heroes into 1847, where they encounter the owners of a ranchero, early Los Angeles ("not even one stoplight?"), gringo pioneers who steal land from the Californios, a handsome vaquero who protects the

ducks from Anglo claim-jumpers, à la the Murieta legend, etc., etc., during a six-week coma. Did the good old conservative Walt Disney know this heady stuff was working on the minds of us kids? Years later, old friends gather around the one remaining, tattered copy of this book in *wonderment*: Dr. Spock does not get all the blame!

Your review was right on the mark.

Larry E. Mowinckel
Napa CA

Alta California and El Pueblo de Nuestra Madre la Reina de los Angeles are pretty scientific fictional places these days. Actually, wicked land-grabbers and poor but virtuous natives have been literary staples for almost as long as there has been literature.

— Editor

Dear George:

I finally gave up playing *Amazing* roulette at the local newsstands, and subscribed. The first issue I received was May 1983. It happened, through the excellence of its stories and other departments, to inspire a letter.

I especially enjoyed "The Observatory." I am glad to finally know something about the people who help you to make the magazines you edit so enjoyable. And I think they truly deserve recognition for the time they spend poring over reams of manuscripts and writing useful, blunt, incisive, unflinching, ruthless, etc. criticisms. I think they must have visited Wong's Lost & Found Emporium to find the best tips for making unpublished writers into published ones. I've saved every note I have received from your Zoo and I'm thinking of visiting the Emporium myself to find my lost courage. Then I can once

more stack some manuscripts on your desk, and receive a few more of the abovementioned criticisms.

I found all of your stories to be very enjoyable this issue, especially "Aquila: The Final Conflict," "Adequate Response," "Wong's Lost & Found Emporium," and "Against Infinity II." The novel excerpts made me anxious to read the complete works, when they reach the stands. The Silverberg column piqued my desire to argue, which is the best sort of opinion column. But if I succumb to that, I won't have time to tell you about my week-long visit with Somtow Sucharitkul.

My family and I met him at the November LosCon, in Los Angeles. We had such a nice time that I offered to help him save expenses for the February Aqua Con by staying at my home. He accepted, and we had a marvelous visit. He has a special gift for enjoying himself. My children were impressed, especially with his ability to play video games. And thanks to the discussions they had, my son saved up enough money to buy a home computer.

For myself, Somtow allowed me to read three of his works-in-progress. It's the first time I've had the opportunity to read professional novels in manuscript form. It was an exciting experience, especially when I came across my son's name for one of the characters in his horror novel.

Over all, I think he had an enjoyable visit. The only thing he seemed a little uncertain about was the rabbit that lives under our couch. Which is fair enough, since I wasn't totally comfortable with his vampire.

Reading Somtow's stories has become quite a new experience since I met him and found what a unique sense of humor he has. I'm grateful

for the number of his works you have presented. You should probably take all the introductions you wrote for them and publish them under one heading. They would make a fine story in themselves.

Thanks again for all the time you and your staff spend on newcomers. It makes your magazine unique and it is amazing (!) how many of your authors go on to success as novelists.

Yours truly,

Janet M. Alvarez
Santa Ana CA

You neglected to mention whether or not the Rabbit Who Lives under the Couch approves of Mr. Sucharitkul's vampire; 'tis a mystery right up there with whether it is the Sucharitkul or the Schweitzer version of the Meaning of Life that is the Truly Authorized Edition.

— Editor

Dear George,

It really galls me to have to say this, considering that I was a really big fan of Elinor Mavor's, and that I was predicting doom for *Amazing* upon your takeover, but . . . I really enjoyed the March issue.

I didn't like your first two issues. There was not a great amount of readable fiction; I only really liked the Haldeman stories, and even they were a bit second rate. I had written a nasty letter about those issues, which I never got around to mailing. It's just as well — I'm about to take all of that back.

First, I'd like to respond to Assistant Editor Darrell Schweitzer's comments in *Empire*, about *Amazing* becoming a "carbon copy" of the old *Asimov's*. Schweitzer denied that it would happen. It seems to me that it has. In just three issues you have

revived five *Asimov's* series-stories! MacIntyre's "Improbable Bestiary," Davidson's "Adventures in Unhistory," Sucharitkul's Aquila, Halde-man's Strange Sport Stories, and Briarton's Feghoots. You have also stopped using all of Elinor's good artists, like Freeman, Harris, etc. Barr and Gaughan are good artists, but their work doesn't have a whole lot of pizazz. One exception, in Gaughan's case, is the cover of the March issue, which was excellent. A strange thing: Gaughan and Barr both used to draw quite a bit for *Asimov's*.

Well, it's quite obvious that you would print basically the same type of thing here as you did in *Asimov's*. After all, if you like the series I mentioned above, or the artists I mentioned above, or writers like Ford, whom I find unreadable, then you're going to print them wherever you edit. I realize that this is so, and it doesn't upset me too much, even though I liked Elinor's *Amazing* more than your *Asimov's*. It just strikes me as strange that Schweitzer's denying so vehemently something that is quite obviously true.

THINGS YOU ARE DOING THAT I LIKE: Printing lots of book reviews, continuing Silverberg's column, running serials, printing poetry, giving Cele Goldsmith Lalli a chance to talk, running Avram Davidson's work.

THINGS YOU ARE DOING THAT I DON'T LIKE: Using John Ford's work, using bad art (on the inside; I've liked the covers), running the Aquila series, printing excerpts.

THINGS I WOULD LIKE YOU TO DO: Have at least six pages of letters each issue, preferably lots more: revive "The Clubhouse" (an old *Amazing* tradition!) and keep it going!! The 'zine's two previous editors were too

wishy-washy about it, starting it and then stopping it. Run more interviews, print fiction by Malzberg and Bunch, and write an editorial to run alongside Silverberg's comments.

As you can see, I like features. For fiction I can go anywhere; for features like book reviews, letters, interviews, and commentary there are only the magazines. I think at least a quarter of the 'zine should be features.

Also: revive *Fantastic*, and stop picking on Ted White! (as in the intro to Davidson's story). [We weren't; Davidson was picking on an unnamed typesetter. — Editor] He did an excellent job on the 'zines for a good seven years. He started to go downhill about '77, I admit; but he did good things with the magazine. For one thing, the editorials and letters and reviews were never better than when he ran the 'zines. So lay off him for a while, okay??

Thank you!

Brian Doherty
11598 West Ride Drive
Jacksonville FL 32217

Our Mr. Schweitzer says that we don't consider our Amazing a carbon copy of Asimov's. In a sense, it's an improved version, but with a much freer approach to fantasy. We are more interested in good fiction than where similar stories previously appeared. Should we have refrained from publishing "Lord of the Skies" because we published Fred Pohl in Asimov's? Of course not. The Feghoot series, we hasten to point out, did not begin in Asimov's, but in F&SF. We are simply interested in well-written, entertaining stories with interesting ideas and well-developed characters.

Quite frankly, even if we wanted to enforce some kind of formula, we wouldn't be able to, because most of any

successful writer's income comes from novels these days. Short fiction is only a sideline. No magazine editor has the kind of economic stranglehold which would let him insist that Gene Wolfe or Robert Silverberg write according to company policy or go unpublished. Science fiction hasn't worked that way since the Great Depression, which was part of what made those years so depressing. So don't be so sure you have us figured out. All right? We admit we have different tastes in artwork, but point out that we do use many of Elinor's best artists, notably Barr and Fabian.

Dear George:

Amazing should publish some fantasy, especially since you're combined with Fantastic. And Carter, Leiber, Zelazny, and new writers need an outlet. Besides, readers who wish to read only science fiction can read Analog.

In answer to a reader's suggestion, I don't think it's necessary for *Amazing* to include gaming news. There are plenty of gaming magazines.

Finally, I'm glad to see the editorial hand of George Scithers at work again. I missed you when you left *Asimov's*. And now that you're at *Amazing*, I've decided to subscribe. Bookstores aren't always reliable.

Sincerely,

James Flanagan
1503 Marvin St.
Longwood FL 32750

Well, editorial inventories being what they are, you really shouldn't have missed us all that much: Asimov's was still working off the material we had bought when our first issue of Amazing came out, and we're still using stories that Elinor Mavor bought. As for fantasy — we publish what we can get. We'd like to publish some good

sword & sorcery; we've published fantasy in Amazing — we'd like to continue doing so. But, just as it's hard to do a convoluted, cause-chasing-effect time-travel story after Heinlein, Gerrold, and Salomon have so thoroughly worked over that sub-genre, so too is it difficult — but clearly not impossible — to say something new about the blundering (or agile, or whatever adjective) barbarian and sinister sorcerer.

— Editor

Dear Mr. Scithers:

I agree with John Betancourt, who said that *Amazing* should have a gaming column. Rôle-playing games have become an important aspect of science fiction of late (as you should know when you consider what corporation pays you). Many of *Amazing*'s readers are already familiar with the games, but some are not.

I like the refurbished *Amazing*. I hope it does well enough to bring back *Fantastic* under its own cover.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Ray
942 South 5th Street
Mayfield KY 42066

*We also hope to bring out *Fantastic* under its own cover. We're currently considering various formats and distributions: it's possible that *Fantastic* will be a standard sized magazine (which in the magazine trade means 8½ inches by 11) — we just don't know yet. Our most important drive right now is to increase the number of subscribers without simply converting newsstand buyers into subscribers, for we need some thirty to fifty times as many subscribers as we now have to be financially sound.*

— Editor

Dear Mr. Scithers:

Over the past couple of months

I've sent several manuscripts for your consideration. Unfortunately, none were accepted; but I did want you to know how much I appreciate the personal comments you've made on the rejection letters. Not as much as I'd appreciate an acceptance, of course; but it's certainly better than a pre-printed, noncommittal card.

I've recently joined a local writer's group; and with their help I hope to be able to discipline myself enough to turn out a story with an actual beginning, middle, and an end. I'm learning by my mistakes.

Again, thanks for taking the time to tell me the "why" behind your rejections. Hope to be able to send you something you can use one of these days.

Sincerely,

Pam Jessen
34 South Hayman Ave.
Colorado Springs CO 80910

Dear People:

I have just completed a short story that I and everyone who has read it (including the folks at a writing workshop at Wayne State University in Detroit) think is pretty good. At last, after eight years of practicing I have written something that I can consider sending to a publisher. *Amazing Stories* was my first choice because of your receptive attitude toward new writers. This means, of course, that you get many more stories than the other magazines (doesn't it?), but it also means that you'll get first crack at my first story, for what it's worth.

But I feel that I should read your booklet on constructing stories before I send you anything. Allah knows that I wouldn't want to send you anything unless it's as perfect as possible. Since all I know about publishing is what Isaac Asimov has written about

his experiences forty years ago, I'd better find out what's going on now.

So please send me a copy of *Constructing Scientifiction & Fantasy*. Enclosed find a check for \$1.00. Then I can make sure all is really well with my story and it will not be in your hands until it is *really* good.

Thank you for your time and trouble. I wish you continued success with your magazine, with or without my help.

Sincerely,

Alan M. Foss
18826 Melvin
Livonia MI 48152

Here are two wholly different approaches to writing: Miss Jessen has leapt right into sending stories to the magazines; Mr. Foss has been refining his technique through a writing workshop first. Which is best? That's for these two writers to find out for themselves; what works for one is not what works for all. At first glance, Mr. Foss seems to be trying hard not to bother us with anything but publishable material. However, his proper aim is not the convenience of the editor, but getting published. Certainly his aim should not be to minimize the chance of being rejected; it is to maximize his chance of being paid and published — and these two aims are not at all the same thing. If he spends too much time perfecting something that is already good, he loses by not moving on to something else — an observation made by Pliny the Younger almost two thousand years ago. On the other hand, feedback from a writing workshop is ever so much faster — and usually far more comprehensive — than can be supplied by an editor who is up to his ears in bad manuscripts.

Miss Jessen realizes, of course, that an acceptance pleases us quite as much as it does her: it means that the time

we've spent reading and commenting on stories by (up to now) unpublished writers has paid off again. We don't comment to be nice; our aim is to get good, publishable manuscripts, and we think that prompt, frank comments on those manuscripts that don't make it will make their writers more able to send us ones that will.

There are many good books on writing, many on writing science fiction; we've written a couple ourselves. Their greatest value, perhaps, is to keep prospective writers from making the same mistakes over and over again. (Do you have any idea how many manuscripts we get which lack their writers' addresses on the first page or title page? Or that have been typed on ribbons that were better burned or buried? We even get an occasional manuscript from someone who thinks that "double space" means spacing horizontally — which is wrong — instead of vertically — which is what we editors want.) It is better to ask stupid questions than to do stupid things; it is better still to look up information first, then ask about what still isn't clear — which is precisely why we wrote the booklet, and why we offer it at just a dollar a copy.

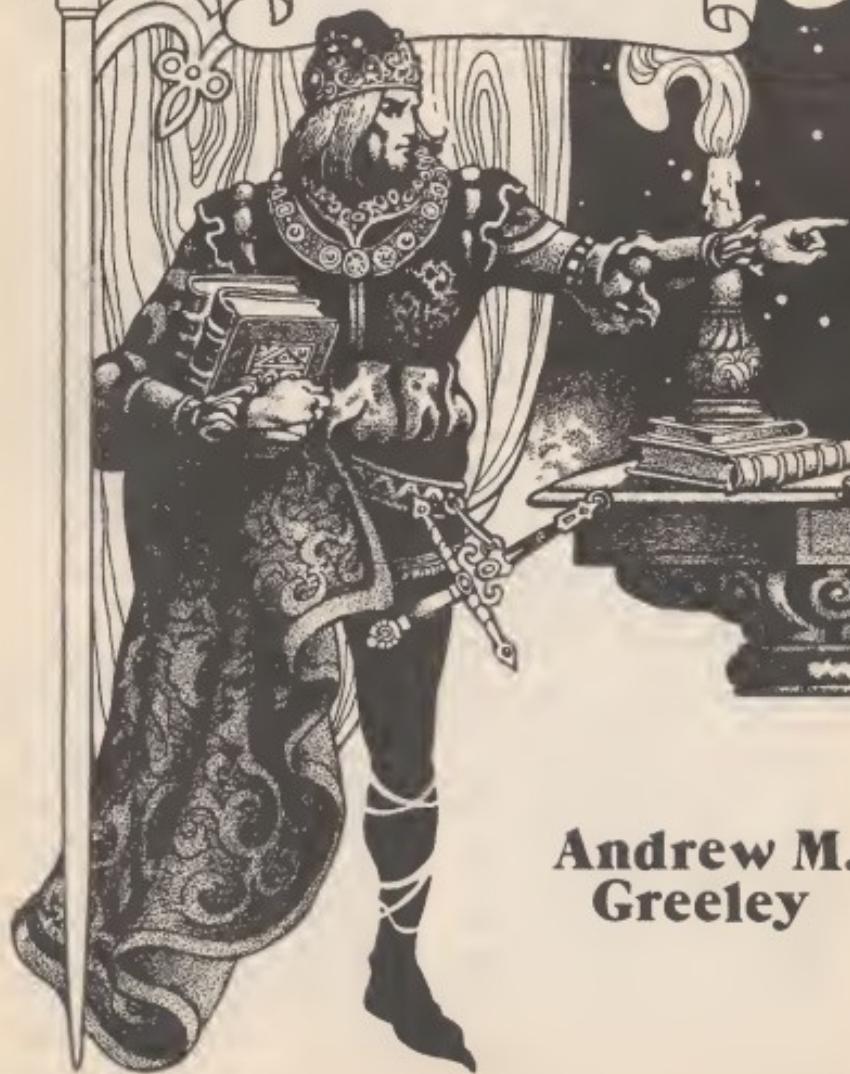
Writing workshops can be helpful, but beware: what one wants is a group of people whose aim is to graduate from writing workshopper to professional writer. Avoid people who are stuck in the workshop phase of their careers; look on the workshop as a transition not an end in itself!

We do not provide manuscript evaluations in order to get more manuscripts; we do it solely to get — eventually — a good supply of publishable manuscripts. Remember: the only opinion on your manuscript that really matters is that of an editor who might buy it.

— Editor



THE GREAT SECRET



**Andrew M.
Greeley**



ILLUSTRATION BY FABIAN

We speak of "God the Father," but should not the Divine whole include also the feminine and maternal? Andrew M. Greeley's two novels touching on this theme, *The Cardinal Sins* and *Thy Brother's Wife*, have reached the best-seller lists. He is a Catholic priest — and a sociologist who has written such works as *The Mary Myth: On the Womanliness of God*. The present story is his first venture into fantastic fiction. What might a denizen of Elsewhere believe — and how might his beliefs be challenged?

When the three moons are in line and also, please Mosthigh, the four planets, and it is the autumn equinox, the Great Secret may be seen by those who are quick enough to see it and whose eyes are penetrating enough to reach beyond the appearances.

The words from the ancient book were important because he had reached the same conclusion before he obtained the book. The Night of the Secret was at hand and would not return for more than a hundred years. And, he was probably the only one in the country who knew or cared.

He looked up from his huge leather-bound tome. Great red and yellow sails were billowing on the river as the boats drifted lazily by. He put aside his writing plume and walked confidently to the windows. This was the day he might finally uncover the Great Secret. Citizens were strolling on the green parkland which marched from his windows down to the broad blue waters of the river. He felt the smooth oak frame of the window as it eased farther open under the pressure of his hand. The glow of the sunset was turning the lawns from green to gold, bathing the white and yellow tunics of the citizens in its warmth. The foliage was already turning color. A perfect autumn day. A day just like the one on which they had brought the girl to him.

He sighed, turned away from the colorful painting which the windows outlined, and walked back to his cluttered mahogany worktable, absently spinning a globe as he passed it. His calculations had to be right, he thought, glancing at the sheets of parchment on the table. If the two planets were in conjunction tonight and produced their expected light, he would know the Great Secret — though there were few people in the world, and none in his kingdom, who would care. He must check the figures again.

His eyes drifted over the statue of Mosthigh on the wall behind his worktable — an attractively pregnant young woman. So his people imagined the Creative Power of the Universe. No wonder it was a confused world. Mosthigh was order and plan, Mosthigh was the Great Secret, not disorderly fertility.

Or to be precise — and he had to be precise about the Creative Power (as he preferred to think of it) — Mosthigh was both the pregnant young woman and the Great Secret, manly and womanly together.

He laughed. His people, however great their affection and respect, would cast him on one of the desert islands far out on the Sea, if they knew he thought such terrible things.

He sat on the soft cushions of the ornate gilt chair by his table, picked up his plume, and then tossed it aside in disgust. He was not able to concentrate. The wretched girl was on his mind.

He sighed again, almost a moan of weariness. He gazed lovingly at the neat shelves of books. After they had won the battle, he had inspected the old library. There were many priceless volumes in it, most of them battered and worn. He had ordered them repaired, sent his envoys to scour the best libraries in other countries, purchased globes, maps, and charts from all over the world. His workroom, here on the terrace looking down to the river, was one of the best small libraries to be found anywhere. Drawings filled the walls, statues of animals and humans crowded around him, his own charts littered the tables and the couches.

At the window, covered with a thick and soft fur, was the huge lense he had caused to be made, the lense which tonight would pry out the shape of the Great Secret.

He got up from the table and rubbed his hand on the soft, rich leather of his favorite collection of books. He had everything he needed now to do his work.

The people did not mind the costs. They were trivial compared to the price of the conflicts which he decisively ended. A ruler who was concerned about globes and books and pictures and giant lenses might be a bit mad, but he was less dangerous than one who was always raising taxes and conscripting young men for wars. They tolerated him, knowing that he was capable of ruthlessly destroying invaders from the outside or disturbers of the peace from within.

He glanced again out the window. Purple clouds were beginning to creep across the sky. He poured himself a goblet of wine from the glittering crystal decanter on his eating table. It was heavy, dry wine which felt warm and pleasant as it slipped down his throat. He was perhaps drinking too much of it. Another day in which he had not swum in the pool, whose marble terrace was on the other side of his workroom. His brain would grow dull from too much wine and too little exercise. He would be worthless for thinking and fighting — should fighting become necessary again. But, by the time the sun rose on the morrow, he would possess the Great Secret, the meaning of the universe — a priceless jewel which was worth everything he had. If only at this critical moment he could think more clearly. He rubbed his hand across his forehead. The headache was returning.

It was her fault. Why had they ever dragged her into his workroom? They know he was not to be disturbed there save for the most important reasons. They must have thought she was important.

He rose from the chair and went to the end of his worktable. His stacks of drawings were neatly arranged there — animals, plants, birds. Each drawing was meticulously done, most of them by himself. Order was beginning to emerge. Soon he would see how it all fit together, understand the harmony and order in the world, discover the hidden secrets of life. He thoughtfully moved a picture of a bear from one stack to another . . . interesting creature . . . his dream of breaking through the Great Secret took possession of him again, held him, caressed him.

He was convinced that the Great Secret was contained ultimately in a single sign, a symbol which existed in everything and which reflected Mosthigh. When all the heavenly bodies were in order, the culmination of these signs, filtered through a powerful lense, would print the Secret on the floor of his workroom. All shape and all force would open to this understanding.

Then, there was an evening breeze through the window. He felt the deep covering of the floor with his feet and remembered the girl again. Why did the floor cover remind him of her? Oh, yes, he grimaced with embarrassment. He had made a fool of himself. They had dragged her in when he was lost in thought. How could he expect to respond wisely?

Her screams and curses had shaken him from his reflections. Surprised, he looked up. "What is the meaning of this disturbance, Marlong?" he wearily asked his commander, who stood in front of him, holding his spear proudly as though he had won a major victory.

"We have captured the last Lenono, Lord," he proclaimed in his deep bass voice. "We found this slut stealing from the garbage dump outside the city. When she is eliminated the struggle between your family and the Lenonos will be forever finished. We will have peace."

The girl's gown was in tatters. She smelled of garbage. She was bruised and bleeding. The guards must have tormented her. Still, she struggled fiercely with her two captors despite the ropes with which she had been tied. These mountain women were reputed to be fierce warriors. He would have to question her about their culture . . . no, that would not be possible. . . .

He stood up unsteadily, still deep in his thought. "What is to be done with her, Marlong?" he asked his commander dubiously.

Marlong intoned solemnly a sentence of doom. "Your uncle put his curse on her. She must be given over to the troops for their amusement. Then, her eyes must be put out and her breasts cut off; she must be tormented in the streets. Finally, she must hang by her hands from the gates of the city until she dies."

He shuddered at the ugliness of the curse. "My uncle's curses are not my curses," he said uncertainly.

Marlong relented. "A quick, merciful blow with your axe, Lord, would do just as well," he said gently.

She was an athletic girl, almost as tall as he was, broad shoulders, slender waist, trim hips, elegant breasts, long lovely legs. A hunter. He reproved himself. Women ought not to be evaluated that way, not even when they were your prisoners.

He could not clear the fog out of his head. The girl was silent now, no longer fighting the guards. He did not know women used the curses she had hurled at him. "Why must she die? What evil had she done? Why by my hands?"

He had neither wanted to nor expected to be king. They brought him back when the Lenonos had killed all the other males in his family. At first there had been covert laughter. How could a slender, dreamy young man possibly be a ruler? He had quickly ended the laughter with decisive victories. You won wars by intelligence, not by sheer brute force. He thought the killing was over.

"She has done no evil herself, Lord," Marlong explained patiently, "though she will if given a chance. Should she live to bear a child, the Lenonos will continue and so will the feud. Too many of our people have died in it already. With a single blow of your axe, you can end this bloodshed forever."

"But, why by my hand?" he asked again.

"She is a royal princess. She can die only by the hand of a king," Marlong insisted, now weary of the king's questions.

It seemed reasonable enough, he thought, as he went to a corner of the room and abstractly took an axe into his hand. His attention was still on the problem of the stars. Why was it that only a king could kill her, but she could be tormented by soldiers? A barbaric people. But, he must seek an answer to this question when it came time to fit laws into his Secret.

"Not here," he had said. "The blood will stain the floor covering. Rather on the terrace by the pool."

The guards dragged the unresisting girl out into the sunlight on the pool terrace. They shoved her roughly to her knees.

"A grace, noble Lord," she pleaded softly.

He pounded the terrace with the handle of the axe. "Speak!" The word was stern. There was something wrong . . . he was groping for it.

"Let me die as a princess. Untie me. I will accept death."

What strange barbaric mountain custom was this? He signaled to the guards. They cut the ropes. The remnants of the gown fell from her shoulders. With death so close, modesty no longer mattered. A very lovely child indeed, if perhaps too many muscles. No more than seventeen winters in her life.

"I accept my death," she said, her voice clear and firm. "I thank you for sparing me further pain. I forgive you for what you must do. I ask your forgiveness for my curses . . ." The voice grew weak. It was a ritual but a touching one. He would someday have to ask her its origins. No, that was absurd. How could he ask her after she was dead?

"Do you forgive me?" She was insisting on a response.

"Yes, of course," he stumbled. Mosthigh, was he supposed to reply in a ritual? He must ask her . . . no, he couldn't ask her. She would not have a head to respond with.

"Then strike quickly, Lord." The words were brave, but her voice was tense. She put her hand behind her head and lifted the long yellow hair away from her neck.

What a lovely, graceful act of ultimate surrender. Someday, he would have to draw it. Would she pose for it? He wondered. The confusion in his brain grew more intense. The course of the stars was implacable, and yet they changed oddly. The Great Secret would say nothing at all about his young life. He raised the axe over his head, feeling the weight of it strain his arms. She had missed one strand of hair. What a pity to sever it.

He hurled the axe across the terrace. It fell with a clattering thud.

"I do not kill defenseless women," he screamed in a voice which was almost hysterical. "Marlong, take this child away. See that she is bathed and fed and clothed. No harm is to come to her. I will make arrangements for her later."

His fury terrified Marlong and the two guards. They left quickly. The girl clutched the tatters of her gown around her body, modesty returning with hope. Her eyes were wide with disbelief.

Marlong returned later. The king sat gazing glumly at the stars, wondering how he had ever come so close to murder.

"It was a noble and generous act, Lord," the commander said evenly. "The citizens are in awe of your goodness. But, they fear that it will mean death for many of their children in years to come."

"When will the citizens learn to trust my wisdom, Marlong?" he replied tartly, wondering how wisdom would help him escape the trap he had built for himself.

They sent the girl to him several days later, discreetly insisting that he do something about her, or perhaps now, given the mentality of his people, do something with her. He shivered. A distraction he did not need. It was midday. He was poring over his charts, preparing for the autumnal equinox observation. He was aware that there was someone standing by his table. A servant girl . . . how long had she been there? No, it was the Lenono princess. They had dressed her well — a simple white gown, strapped at one shoulder and tied with a thin cord at her waist, no jewelry save for the single silver ring which bound her golden hair. They had wisely chosen to let the natural beauty of her body speak for itself.

"I thank you for my life, Lord," she said gravely when he looked up.

"It was a single strand of your hair which saved you. I could not bear to cut it." The words tumbled out before he knew what he was saying. He smiled at her.

"Why spare the hair and not the head?" Her gray eyes were puzzled.

Witless. What else could you expect from someone who grew up in the mountains? "Both, fortunately for the two of us, have been spared," he responded lamely.

"You work hard, Lord," she continued, gazing at his table.

Eagerly he picked up the huge tome of the Wise Man from which he had been copying. "Do you read, child?"

There was a faint flush of embarrassment in her smooth skin.

"No, Lord," she said sadly, "it is not the custom with our people for women to read." She hesitated, and then added hopefully, "I will try to learn to read. . . ."

Witless and illiterate. Nevertheless, he began to explain his work to her. Carried away by his enthusiasm, he showed her the charts, the globes, the drawings, the books, spinning his ambitious dream, showing her how he was pursuing the secrets of the universe as a hunter chased the stag. She listened gravely, her pretty face a mask. He hurried on, explaining the convergences from the plant and animal kingdoms and the course of the stars. He told her why the autumn equinox was so important this year, how it could be the key which would unlock the Great Secret of the cosmos and how he would then possess that Secret.

When he finished, he knew that his eyes were shining, his face glowing, his voice ringing with enthusiasm.

"What will you then do with the Secret, Lord?" she asked humbly.

"Do with it, child?" he exploded. "I will *know* it."

"Oh," was all she said.

Impatiently, he walked over to the eating table, took two apples, gave one to her and sank his teeth into the other himself. An interesting taste — the apple . . .

He explained to her his theories, even the most dangerous one, that Mosthigh was manly. Her eyes widened with shock and dismay, but shrewd mountain hunter that she was, she held her tongue.

He realized early in his search for the Great Secret that it required passionate devotion, which could not permit deep involvement with women. Long before he had reluctantly returned to a country of which he could recover only a few childhood memories, he decided he should avoid women. There were times when out of need he would enjoy one, but as quickly as possible, and with the shame for his body which betrayed him into physical lust when all his desire ought to be focused on the Secret. He could easily use this child: she was defenseless.

They had stood silently eating their apples and watching the sails on

the river. "You think I am mad," he said finally.

Those grave, gray eyes turned on him. "I think you are brave, wise, and generous, Lord," she replied simply.

He laughed. "So a little madness is tolerable — which, dear child, is what everyone thinks of me."

"I have never known a man as good as you," she replied promptly, evading a comment on his sanity.

There was nothing wrong with her lithe athlete's body. Doubtless the muscles in her arms and back and thighs were strong, but her graceful womanliness was disturbingly obvious. She lowered her eyes, knowing that he was mentally stripping her. His ideals told him he ought not to imagine her naked, but it was pleasurable nevertheless. The curses she had spoken were not those of a modest woman. Crude, prudish, illiterate . . . but very clever. Typical of her people.

He poured her a goblet of wine. She sipped it appreciatively. "These are your drawings, Lord?" She casually picked up his sketches from the worktable and began to leaf through them. "You draw very skillfully."

He wrenched the picture from her hand. "You little fool!" he shouted. "They are in a secret order. How dare you disturb them?" His breath came in outraged gulps.

The girl drew back from him, holding the wrist he had cruelly twisted. Anger flamed in her gray eyes. The flame went out. She fell on her knees, tearfully begging his pardon.

Thoroughly befuddled again, he lifted her off the floor, apologized as best he could, slowly went through the pictures showing each one to her.

She dried her tears and watched silently. He picked up the goblet she had dropped when he struck her, filled it again, and led her to the gallery of statues. "A very beautiful woman," she remarked wistfully touching the statue's thigh.

"There are many advantages to stone women over real ones," he said sarcastically. "They are satisfied with their own beauty and do not envy the beauty of others."

The grim gray eyes gazed solemnly at him again. The girl was trying to determine whether it was a compliment or an insult. He did not know himself.

"It is true, wise Lord," she said slowly, her fingers on the foot of the stone woman. "Yet, this lovely person would not keep you warm on a cold winter night."

He explained to her his theory of force and form, that they were both the same thing and that the statue was held in its form by a force which is the same as that which a running, shall we say, woman displays.

"You mean when I run, I'm just like that statue?" she asked dubiously.

"In some fundamental sense, yes."

"Oh," she said politely.

"Now you are convinced I am mad?"

She asked his permission to take her leave. He granted it willingly.

She came again several days later, in the heat of the early afternoon, surprising him in his loincloth as he was preparing to swim. He hated to waste time with bodily exercise, but he knew that he had to do it to keep his mind clear and to be fit for battle, should war ever recur. She was flustered at the sight of him and turned to leave. Impulsively, he invited her to swim with him. Turning a deep crimson, she told him it was not the custom among her people to swim nude. He rummaged around the chests at the side of the pool and found a swimming garment for her. He left his loincloth on.

She dove skillfully into the pool and swam back and forth with strong, vigorous, almost masculine strokes. Whatever her defects in intelligence, she would be a useful companion in battle. He tried to pursue her in a race. Silently, she increased her speed and beat him. Breathless, he stopped swimming and clung to the side of the pool, watching the path of the sun, now filmed over by thin clouds.

There was a hand on his head pushing downward. The water swirled over him. It poured into his mouth and down his throat. Desperately, he fought to free himself. Then, the hand was gone and he was breathing air again. She was on the other side of the pool laughing at him. He dove after her; she eluded his grasp. He caught an ankle and pulled her underwater. They struggled, wrestled, fought underwater. She broke loose, climbed out of the pool and ran around it. He chased her, caught her, and, aware now that he was laughing as hard as she, threw her into the pool and jumped in after her.

They frolicked like young animals for much of the afternoon.

When they were both too exhausted to play anymore, they sat quietly on the edge of the pool eating apples and sipping wine. She had covered herself with a towel, still dissatisfied with the protection of the brief, wet gown, which clung revealingly to her body.

"What is your name, child?" he asked, "If I am to be drowned so cruelly, I should know the name of my assailant."

She flung her wet yellow hair behind her shoulders. "You finally ask, Lord?" There was no mistaking the rebuke. "I am called Donela." She drew the big towel closer to her body.

His face was hot. He had to say something. "A name as musical as the one who bears it."

She turned away from him, her sturdy calves emerging from beneath the towel. "It was on this very spot I almost lost my head," she said thoughtfully.

Oh, oh, will I never recover from that humiliation? "You were never in any danger, lovely Donela. I am not a murderer. I regret that it took me so long to come to my senses. I ask your forgiveness." The words had been

spoken without careful thought; so, too, had he thoughtlessly seized her hand.

"Eagerly given, Lord." She turned back to him, her eyes wide with astonishment, a trace of a baffled smile on her face. "But, your generosity has created a terrible problem for you, has it not?

"There are three things you can do with me, Lord. You can kill me — but your goodness will not let you do that. You can leave me a virgin — but that makes me the likely cause of conflict in the years to come among those who wish to fight old wars again. Or . . . but you and I know the third possibility, don't we, Lord?"

She had spoken evenly, calmly. Now, she was shrewdly watching him for his reaction, her gray eyes hard. "What can I say, shrewd princess?"

"You can give me permission to resume decent garb and take my leave. But, you must remember that even the third choice carries great danger. When there are offspring, what would prevent me from putting a knife in your back some night and finally winning the war for my family?"

The sun had set, the soft smell of autumn twilight was in the air. It was the equinox, the day of his final test. He poured yet another goblet of wine. He could calculate no longer. The evidence would be there in the sky before midnight. His head ached, his body was weary. Donela — her body, her shrewdness, her threat — lurked in the back of his mind for days. If he was wrong, if the Great Secret should elude him tonight, it would be the wench's fault. He would strangle her . . . no, he was being absurd, she could not prevent the three planets from coming into conjunction.

First, he removed the heavy fur covering from his great lense, hanging in front of the open window facing the river, a river now bathed a delicious silver by the three slowly converging moons.

He focused his telescope on the spot in the sky, just above his boathouse — how long since he'd floated on the river with a slice of cheese and a jar of wine. Perhaps he could take . . .

Resolutely, he forgot about his boat and studied the three planets visible to the eye and the two others that could be picked up only with his telescope. They were all moving towards the convergence point, just as the book — and his own calculations — said they would.

The three moons came together often, several times a year, bathing the country in warm, friendly light — and throwing lovers, of every age, into a frenzy.

He steeled himself against the sound of the dance music floating up from the river, and from the other side of his castle.

But rarely did the five planets converge with the three moons and very rarely indeed did it happen on the equinox.

Doubtless, there would be more dancing, more singing, and more love

making tonight because two festivals — moon and equinox — occurred together.

He devoutly hoped that there would be no disturbances which Marlong could not handle by himself.

He rolled back the floor cover, revealing the carefully designed map of heaven he had drawn on the floor. Even now the light was sufficiently bright that he could see the details and admire this craftsmanship.

Then, he fussed with the four "picture boxes" which he had placed at the crucial corners of the drawing, to record the Great Secret when it appeared, captured and momentarily helpless, on his floor. Perhaps, he should put Donela in the picture box — it would be a valuable portrait: kneeling, naked with her head tilted for the blow of his axe. He savored the picture for a few seconds and then briskly dismissed it.

Carefully, he moved the stand in which the lense was suspended so that the center of the great curved glass was in line with the pinnacle on the boathouse.

He noted uneasily that the trees at the river bank were stirring. A light breeze coming up river from the Sea.

There could be no storm tonight, and the wind should not worry him . . . Still . . .

He glanced at the sand timer on his massive oak desk, the only thing worthwhile he'd inherited from his demented uncle. Time had slipped by. Only a brief wait till the magic moment.

One eye on the falling sands and the other on the glowing sky, he waited, obsessed by time and yet feeling that time now stood still.

The breeze was stronger. The drapes on his other windows were rustling now. The lense swayed slightly.

He slipped away from his desk, made sure that the lense was fastened properly to its harness, and then moved to the corner of the room where the mechanisms for the picture boxes and their illuminators were located. They should function automatically, but he would take no chances.

Then, after an eternity of waiting, the three moons came together, just as they ought to, a few more grains of sand and the planets would line up behind them. The concentrated powers of order would hover briefly over his kingdom . . .

A sharp gust of wind: then the light on the floor was bright as day; the illuminators on his picture boxes exploded.

Wind shrieked through the open window. On the floor there was only dazzling light, no pattern . . . there had to be a pattern. He reset the firing mechanism for the picture boxes and pressed the button.

Another explosion, still no pattern, a fierce blast of wind, the lense tilted toward him.

He rushed across the map of heaven, reached out to push the lense back in place and triggered the picture boxes for a third time.

They would show him struggling against the crashing lense and then ducking out of its way the second before it shattered into hundreds of jagged pieces on the floor.

The broken shards gleamed like a room full of precious stones and then slowly lost their glow as the moons drifted apart.

For a long time, he sat motionless at his uncle's desk. . . .

His head, throbbing with pain, was sunk in his hands. His calculations were foolishness. The Great Secret was no closer than it had been months before. He would have to begin again. He did not even bother to pour himself more wine. He would have to stop drinking so much of it. It was not the wine, it was the girl. If he had her, he would beat her almost to death for her cursed distractions.

Yet, when she came in, glowing in the now pale moonlight, he did not thrash her. She wore only a thin blue cloth tied under her arms. Her hair fell on her shoulders, gold and silver. She had used powerful scent. She stepped around the broken glass, daintily lifting her skirt. The garment was designed to emphasize her breasts, as though that were necessary.

"It did not go well tonight?" she asked anxiously.

So, she understood that the equinox was important.

"No, child, the Great Secret is as far away from me as it ever was." His voice was heavy with sadness.

She sat on the edge of his chair, her flank close to his face, "I am truly sorry, Lord. I hope you find the Great Secret. I will help you search for it. But, now that you are unhappy and lonely. I must seduce you."

He laughed happily, "This is the night of the double feast and all women must seduce their beloveds."

The girl was inexperienced and prudish. Despite her brave words, she knew little of the art of seduction. Still, her kisses were hot and her body was warm in his arms. Her muscles were indeed strong.

"Will you do this on the night you put the knife in my back?" he said, his voice muffled by her probing lips.

He was not her beloved. She had no right . . . She pulled back. Angry now? No, she was laughing. "Oh, foolish, foolish Lord. Shame on you! Surely you are not that silly! You could not have believed that I would do that! Where would I ever find another man like you? I might drown you in the pool if you become impertinent, but kill you so as to rule by myself? Even if I didn't love you as much as I do, I know that if you were dead, I would be back in the garbage heaps in ten days!"

Her laughter was buried as she began to kiss his chest. He could feel her heart beating rapidly underneath his fingers. He drew her closer, pressing one hand firmly against the soft flesh of her buttocks. A delicious morsel . . . She was trembling, poor child . . . an innocent for all her curses and attempted lewdness. Gently he pushed her away.

"Give me a chance to breathe, child. Do you seduce all your lovers this

feverishly?"

She was not deceived by the joke. He was rejecting her. She stayed in his arms, but her body no longer clung tightly to his.

"You are a fool, master!" She kissed him, ineptly perhaps, but not without some effect on him. "I still love you."

He eased her away. "I'm honored," he said with perhaps a little truth, "but tonight is not the night, mountain princess. Tomorrow or the next day, after I calculate where my mistakes were, we will discuss this matter again."

He stood up, helped her to her feet, wrapped her garment around her, patted her rump and said, "Go back to your room, child."

There was an important insight in the back of his head, but he could not quite find it. If only the vexatious child would leave him alone, he would perhaps be able to salvage something from the rubble.

Obediently, she picked her way through the broken glass and walked to the door of his chambers.

She turned at the top of the steps, adjusted her wrap so that it was in perfect position.

"I have thought about your heresy concerning Mosthigh," she nodded towards the idol on his wall. "That is not madness. Otherwise, I would not have my head."

There was a leap of logic there that escaped him . . . perhaps because his headache was growing more painful.

"However, all-wise master," she drew herself up to her full height and stood for a moment like the queen she would doubtless be, "if Mosthigh is both woman and man, both life and order, what holds her and him together . . . ?"

"That is a very stupid question," he said roughly, pressing his fingers against his forehead, "Because . . . "

He could not, Mosthigh help him, say why it was stupid.

"Mosthigh is held together by what holds men and women together," she insisted, quite regal now — and her breasts were very lovely — "that is your Great Secret of the Universe. And everyone in your kingdom but you knows it already . . . I still love you, good and marvelous master, but you often are a tiresome dolt."

She whirled around, displaying a good deal of calf and thigh as she did, and sailed forth from the room, like an angry ship of war stalking out of a harbor that it has destroyed.

"Romantic nonsense," he shouted after her.

His headache was much worse.

He sighed and sank back into his chair. The disgusting wench. She exhausted him. What was that insight? He rummaged through his worthless charts and found a writing plume. He wrote it out: "Women see the faults of men clearly; they simply pay no attention to them."

It did not seem like such a great insight written that way. It required perhaps some verses. It started out to be a poem about the Great Secret, then it turned into a poem about Love, and then a poem about Donela. It was a very good poem, he thought.

Would she like it, he wondered, when he read it to her on the morrow? 6

VAMPIRE

No sound escorts his footstep. No moon
Inflicts his shadow on the wall.
Patterned dust beneath his heel is strewn
By castle drafts and things that crawl
Toward you.

He is as he must always be — nostrils
To the wind, joining with the blackness,
Skimming trees where breezes shrill,
Wolves that howl while church bells bless
The nightfall.

Like a fan, the town devours itself
In closing. Doors are bolted and old
Prayers spoken while one girl steps
Toward the door — there, to hold
Communion.

This morning he dreams of days before
When sunlight filled his veins and skin
With warmth he did not borrow;
Days as fresh, days as dead, as roses
On the snow.

— Wendy McElroy

BEYOND EINSTEIN: THE SEARCH FOR THE SUPERTHEORY OF QUANTUM GRAVITY

by Steve Aaronson

Steve Aaronson is a science writer whose work has appeared in Omni, Science Digest, and New Scientist. He began his career in 1973, after studying writing at Penn State University with Philip Klass (the well-known SF writer "William Tenn"). Aaronson's writing interests tend toward the limits of science and technology — the creation of the universe, the end of time, the edges of space, and how the seeming paradoxes of the quantum principle might tie it all together. His research associate, Linda Cooper, helps keep him at the limits of development in a variety of fields.

The entire structure of modern physics rests on two pillars: the quantum theory and Einstein's theory of gravity. Until recently there was little connection between them. But in the last few years this situation has changed so drastically that today we can begin to see the outlines of a new theory, called quantum gravity, that will explain what space itself is made of and how the universe began.

Gravity was the first — and for millions of years the only — force that people experienced directly, by the effort of standing up, the pain of falling, and the exhaustion of climbing uphill. But aside from the Earth's pull, the gravitational attraction between bodies in our human-sized world is negligibly small. Two apples placed near each other on a tabletop never roll toward one another because of gravitational attraction.

Nature contains hundreds of different kinds of particles of matter — far more than we really need. But there are only four forces — called the strong nuclear force, the electromagnetic force, the weak nuclear force, and gravity — and all four seem to be absolutely necessary. Without the strong nuclear force there would be no atomic nuclei and no matter. Without electromagnetism there would be no heat or light, no atoms, and no chemistry. Without the weak nuclear force there would be no radioactive decay of atoms, and no supernova explosions in which dying suns spread their life-giving elements through space. And without gravity there would be no galaxies, stars, or planets. It seems like all four forces were designed from the beginning to create conditions ideal for life.

At the human-sized scale the four forces have vastly different strengths. But there is one scale on which all the forces are about equal —

the very, very, *very* small. This is because the universe we now live in is but a frozen, hopelessly dilute, matter-contaminated remnant of one glorious moment about 18 billion years ago, the moment when the Universe suddenly burst into being. It was in that tiny fraction of a second that all the key features of nature were determined. But a quantum theory of gravity is needed to explore this early stage.

The big-bang theory implies that today's physics, formerly assumed to be valid in the farthest corners of the universe and infinitely far into the past and future, must have a definite beginning and an end. According to the theory, the universe began in an incredibly hot, dense fireball which exploded, violently hurling energy, matter, and space outward. The galaxies are still moving away from one another, although gravitational attraction among them is slowing the expansion. If the matter is dense enough, gravity might eventually halt the expansion and the universe might begin to contract.

Most physicists now accept the big-bang theory, but none can answer the question, "What came before the big bang?" Dennis W. Sciama, a theoretical physicist at Oxford University, is one of the few to discuss this phase at all. But he sees two problems. The first is that "we still do not know how to quantize gravity." The second is that "the physics which we do understand is hard to understand. While astronomers are now coming to terms with general relativity, they still find quantum field theory formidably difficult. The union of these two theories, even in the fragmentary form in which it exists today, is even more difficult."

Steven Weinberg, who shared the 1979 Nobel Prize in Physics for his theoretical unification of the weak and electromagnetic forces, comments, "My confidence extends back to the first ten-billionth of a second. But not beyond that." One theory holds that the present expansion began after a "bounce" from a previous period of contraction. Thus the universe would alternately expand, reach a maximum, contract, reach a minimum, and so on, forever. Weinberg feels that this idea "is certainly a wide open possibility. It's a big question mark. Whether or not there really is a turnaround depends on physical things that we don't understand. We need a quantum theory of gravity to understand it."

It is somehow fitting that the crisis in modern physics concerns gravity, since gravity was the first of the forces to be recognized and described scientifically. In the sixteenth century Galileo contradicted the Aristotelian view that heavier bodies fall faster than lighter ones. According to legend, he climbed the leaning tower of Pisa, dropped an iron ball with a wood ball, and observed that both hit the ground at the same time.

The year Galileo died, Isaac Newton was born. Newton's laws of motion explained why the light and heavy balls fell together: because for each ball the Earth's gravitational pull was balanced by the inertial resistance of the ball's mass. Although the iron ball was more strongly

attracted, its greater mass resisted movement more strongly. Ever since the time of Newton, who expressed his laws mainly in the language of mathematics, physicists have needed to use complex equations to communicate with one another.

Another unification was accomplished in the nineteenth century by James Clerk Maxwell, who invented a set of equations to unify electricity and magnetism. Maxwell's elegant equations needed only one force, electromagnetism, to account for such diverse phenomena as sunlight, the swing of a compass needle, and the static electricity generated from walking across a carpet. Thus, near the beginning of the twentieth century most scientists held the opinion that all the complex phenomena of gravity and electromagnetism could be explained by the laws of Newton and Maxwell. This view was soon shattered by a 26-year-old patent clerk.

The special theory of relativity, proposed in 1905 by Albert Einstein, united time and space in a way previously unimaginable. It made the speed of light, 186,000 miles per second, a universal speed limit, and abolished privileged frames of reference, substituting a democratic outlook in which one observer's viewpoint was as valid as another's. Although intervals in space were different for two observers, and intervals in time were different for two observers, intervals in spacetime were the same for everyone. This unification of space and time was so radical that it demanded a revised theory of gravity.

In 1916 Einstein proposed this theory of gravity, which he called the general theory of relativity. In it he said that space, instead of being an ideal perfection that stands alone and unchanged above the interplay of matter and energy, is itself a participant in physical processes. Space tells matter how to move; matter tells space how to curve. Thus the Earth's orbit around the sun is in fact the straightest spacetime path it can follow. The curvature of space gives rise to gravity.

Einstein's "principle of equivalence" viewed the effects of gravity and accelerated motion in exactly the same way. In a completely enclosed room, he said, you could not tell whether you were accelerating uniformly through space or sitting still on the surface of a planet. He also predicted that clocks would run slower in strong gravitational fields than in weak ones. Thus a secretary working on the ground floor of the World Trade Center would age more slowly than her twin sister working on the top floor. And Einstein's theory held that in a strong gravitational field, light would be deflected or even pulled backward.

A crucial test of general relativity was whether starlight would be deflected in the Sun's gravitational field. This deflection could be observed only during a total eclipse of the Sun. In 1919 a British expedition observed such an eclipse and confirmed Einstein's theory, making him a celebrity. Years later, speaking of a friend who stayed

awake all night to see if his theory would be confirmed, Einstein said, "If he had really understood the way the general theory of relativity explains the equivalence of inertial and gravitational mass, he would have gone to bed the way I did."

In the last decade dozens of sophisticated tests have supported Einstein's theory and discredited all rivals. The most recent confirmation was made in 1977 by the Viking spacecraft, which landed on Mars and sent signals grazing past the Sun toward the Earth.

In spite of these tests, however, physicists know that Einstein's theory of gravity must be wrong, or at least in contradiction with quantum theory, in three places. In the big bang, Einstein's theory states that the universe began in a geometric point; quantum theory says there is a limit to smallness. In the black hole, Einstein's theory predicts infinite compaction; quantum theory says such infinities are nonsense. And in tiny chunks of space-time, Einstein's theory calls for smoothness and calm; quantum theory demands lumpiness and constant motion.

Weinberg thinks that these absurd features of general relativity cannot be cured. He says, "I think that general relativity is wrong as a description of gravitation on scales of the order of 10^{-33} centimeters and below. Since that is twenty orders of magnitude smaller than the nucleus of an atom, it is not an urgent problem for most concerns in physics. However, it is precisely the kind of internal lack of consistency that led Einstein to general relativity in the first place."

A crisis similar to the present one occurred in 1911. Scientists knew that in the atom electrons with a negative electric charge orbited a positively-charged nucleus. Since opposite charges attract, this knowledge led to the ridiculous but inescapable prediction that the electrons would smash into the nucleus, and atoms would quickly collapse. The way out was furnished by the quantum theory.

Quantum mechanics, developed in the 1920s by Niels Bohr, Werner Heisenberg, Erwin Schrödinger and others, showed particles and waves to be two different ways of looking at the same thing. An important part of the theory was the "uncertainty principle," which holds that it is impossible to know both where a particle is and how fast it is going at the same time. Thus the electron had to be viewed not as a point-like particle that might crash into the nucleus, but as a moving wave "smeared" over space. There could be only a probability, never a certainty, that the electron was in any particular position. This explained how matter could be stable.

Quantum theory is the most precise and the most powerful theory in physics; every system that physicists have pursued far enough has turned out to be governed by it. The quantum theory has two inviolable rules. One, a consequence of the "uncertainty principle," is that you can never predict how a system will change. The other is that nothing can be smaller

than the quantum limit — no mechanical action can be smaller than the quantum of elementary length, and no time interval can be smaller than the quantum of elementary duration.

The quantum limit is defined by the Planck length, named for the physicist Max Planck. It is far smaller than any distance that can be reached experimentally today, or that we have any hope of ever reaching. But the Planck length is crucial in explaining the creation and eventual destruction of the universe. Eventually, gravitational collapse brings the world of the very large down to the size of the very small, the size governed by the quantum limit.

At the Planck length, space-time itself wiggles and foams, folding back on itself and sometimes forming tunnels called "wormholes." John Wheeler, Director of the Center for Theoretical Physics at the University of Texas and a key contributor to both quantum theory and relativity, describes the quantum fluctuations this way: "You're in a plane over the ocean. Looking down from six miles the ocean looks smooth. A few minutes later, you find yourself in a life raft and the waves are breaking, and you see that the surface is highly irregular; what's more, instead of being merely irregular, it has breaks in it — droplets breaking loose. Space too looks smooth at the scale of everyday life, smooth at the scale of atomic structure, and smooth at the scale of nuclear structure. But when one gets down to the scale of distances twenty powers of ten smaller than the scale of nuclear structure, then one predicts that the geometry is foam-like."

Albert Einstein never believed in these quantum fluctuations or in the probabilistic interpretation of quantum theory. He maintained that if only we could find the "hidden parameters," a fully deterministic theory would be possible. He wrote, "Quantum mechanics is certainly imposing. But an inner voice tells me that it is not yet the real thing. The theory says a lot, but does not really bring us any closer to the secret of the 'old one.' I, at any rate, am convinced that *He* is not playing at dice."

According to quantum theory, forces are transmitted by the exchange of force-carrying particles. For instance, the electromagnetic field is transmitted by photons, the particles of light. The particles of the strong nuclear force are called "gluons" because they "glue" the nucleus together. The particles of the weak nuclear force, called "intermediate bosons," have only recently been found.

No one has yet observed particles of gravity, but there is good reason to suppose they exist. They play a central role in a radical new theory known as supergravity, which predicts two particles of gravity, the graviton and the gravitino. Supergravity also explains the role of a mysterious property of particles called spin, which physicists can measure but not explain. Particles with odd multiples of the proton's spin are called fermions, and particles with even multiples are called bosons. Until recently, physicists

believed that the family of fermions and the family of bosons obeyed entirely different rules. But in supergravity, the graviton is a boson, while the gravitino is a fermion. Both obey the same rules and transmit the same force — gravity. Therefore a new way of looking at the larger picture is needed.

This overview is called supersymmetry. First formulated in the U.S.S.R. in 1971, supersymmetry relates the property of spin to the structure of space-time. It predicts that repeated transformations of a particle from fermion to boson move it from point to point in space. We see this movement as the effect of gravity.

Weinberg calls the supersymmetry theories "very, very beautiful." But he adds, "I suspect that they don't solve the problem of the infinities, and so far none of them have jelled to the point where you could say they really describe nature. But I think they probably have an element of truth in them."

Beyond supergravity and supersymmetry, the complex ideas of physicists, heavily laden with mathematics, become difficult to discern or describe. For example, Claudio Teitelboim, a former student of Wheeler, interprets supergravity as "the square root of general relativity." Teitelboim has gone so far in his quantum theory of gravity as to compare the expanding universe to a particle of matter, and the contracting universe to a particle of antimatter (the mirror image of matter).

Another idea is an imaginary "superparticle" with an arrow through its center. As the particle rotates in a multi-dimensional "auxiliary space," the arrow turns. Thus the superparticle becomes in turn a graviton, a gravitino, a photon, a quark, and so on. This single particle would produce all the forces of nature. Another idea for theoretical entities that would transmit all the forces is "twistors," invented by Roger Penrose of Oxford University. In addition to carrying forces, twistors would make up all subatomic particles of matter.

Wheeler has introduced the idea of "superspace" as the arena in which space and time move. "Superspace is not endowed with three or four dimensions," Wheeler explains. "It is endowed with an infinite number of dimensions. Any single point in superspace represents an entire three-dimensional world with all its curves. Nearby points represent slightly different three-dimensional worlds with slightly different curves here and there. Superspace is the clearest way we've found to state the content of the quantum theory of relativity, of quantum gravity. And yet it does more than that. It shows us that the idea of space-time itself is an approximate idea, not a basic idea, and it shows us that time itself is an approximate idea.

When Einstein interpreted gravity as a curvature in the geometry of space-time, he also predicted that space-time would "ripple" with gravity waves, waves that travel through space at the speed of light and shake

other masses. A gravity wave travelling straight down on a tennis court, for example, would first make the court slightly longer and narrower, and then slightly shorter and wider. But objects as small (on an astral scale) as Earth, or even the Sun, radiate very weak gravity waves. So our only hope of observing the waves is to construct very sensitive instruments and hope for a big astro-physical event like a collision between galaxies. No one has yet detected gravity waves, but physicists at many laboratories are trying.

One of the more bizarre predictions of Einstein's theory of gravity is that huge amounts of matter can focus light like a lens. In 1979 astronomers at the University of Arizona observed what they interpreted as the image of a single quasar split into three parts by the enormous gravity of some unknown object. Additional observations of this kind might help test proposed theories of quantum gravity. But the clearest test would be detailed observation of a black hole.

A star a few times larger than the sun eventually uses up its nuclear fuel and collapses into a black hole, an object so dense that nothing, not even light, can escape its gravitational pull. During the last fraction of a second the whole mass of the star moves inward at nearly the speed of light, emitting a strong pulse of gravity waves. Observation of such an event, estimated to occur about once every fifteen years, would bring physicists closer to quantum gravity.

In 1974, Stephen Hawking of the University of Cambridge took a giant step toward quantum gravity by predicting that black holes can explode. Hawking realized that tidal effects near the black hole's surface would squeeze pairs of particles out of empty space. While one member of the pair might fall into the black hole, the other particle might escape. Thus the black hole would lose energy and, after a period of slow evaporation, would explode with tremendous energy.

The tidal effects would be even more drastic in the case of a very small black hole. A "minihole" weighing a billion tons, for instance, would be the size of a proton. It would radiate heat at a hundred billion degrees, and would last for ten billion years before exploding. Although they could not be produced by any known present-day process, miniholes could have formed right after the big bang. If detected, they would offer a tremendous opportunity to study the features of quantum gravity.

One of these features is antigravity, proposed as a consequence of supergravity by J. Scherk of the Laboratoire Normale Supérieure in Paris. According to Scherk, under certain conditions gravitons might neutralize one another, canceling out the force of gravity. Antigravity would suppress the Earth's pull by only a millionth, but in some cases antigravity could operate over distances as short as a few yards. At very high temperatures, such as prevailed in the early universe, antigravity might have important effects.

If the idea of antigravity seems farfetched, try to imagine how people

fifty years ago would have viewed descriptions of lasers, television, and microcomputers. Yet each is a product of basic advances in quantum theory in the 1930s, and none could have been foreseen at that time. Newton's laws of mechanics preceded the Industrial Age, and quantum theory preceded today's Information Age. In the same way, the next level of physics might bring unexpected technologies so powerful that they will transform our society in ways we cannot now imagine.

The immediate technological impact of the search for quantum gravity is in its need for ever more precise instruments. According to Wheeler, "The business of looking for gravitational radiation will push instrumentation to a new level. And instruments are the real frontier of physics. Physics makes itself felt in medicine, biology, chemistry, engineering, and manufacturing more through its instruments than in any other single way. I look forward to that being a real payoff to the whole community."

The most profound impact of the new physical ideas might be on our philosophy and our culture. "Go back to every religion that has propelled people," says Wheeler, "and there's a cosmology at the center of it: Chapter One. To me, the cosmological point of view is the central point of view that makes people tick."

A hint of a shift in point of view might be detected in the resurgence of the idea that man is central to the universe. This "anthropic" view, out of fashion since the Middle Ages, holds that the universe and its forces exist as they are simply because we are here to observe them. D. V. Nanopoulos of the European Center for Nuclear Research in Geneva asserts that human existence puts narrow limits on such physical constants as the ratio of mass to energy in the universe and the types of elementary particles called quarks. Nanopoulos says these limits are "necessary for our existence, or the existence of anything interesting at all." In his view, a unified theory of quantum gravity will help explain why "to a greater extent than was imagined, things simply must be as they are."

A successful theory of quantum gravity is imminent, according to Weinberg. He says, "I would guess that by the year 2010, or 2020, someone will have found a theory that really hangs together beautifully, that eliminates the infinities, and that has all the known forces and particles in neat little families. And when that happens it probably will be the right theory." Wheeler adds, "Anybody who thinks that science would come to an end at that point wouldn't understand. We're in the middle of a sea of ignorance, and the larger the island of knowledge becomes, the longer becomes the shoreline of the unknown. The more we find out, the more we will have to find out."

"The universe is immensely simpler that we now appreciate," Wheeler continues. "And we won't see it as simple unless we rise to a higher view of what is involved than we have today. We're too much at a nuts-and-bolts level. It's important to be at that level, but the whole point is to get

away from gears and pinions and power laws and get to a higher point of view. It's a kind of picture puzzle, where we have bits and pieces, and it isn't enough just to fit them together in one corner. We've got to search for the broader pattern."

Quantum theory was the result of a team effort, but many other great scientific unifications were made by one individual who was able to rise above illusion and irrelevance to view the broader pattern. Newton brought order to the heavens with his laws of motion; Darwin unified biological diversity with his view of evolution; Einstein joined space with time and matter with energy in his relativity theory. The next level of physics will not topple the two pillars of quantum theory and general relativity, but will unite them in a single theory more precise, more durable, and more true than any previous physical theory. The genius who will see this higher view might today be a clerk, a graduate student, a working physicist — or perhaps is yet unborn. Quantum gravity awaits this giant.

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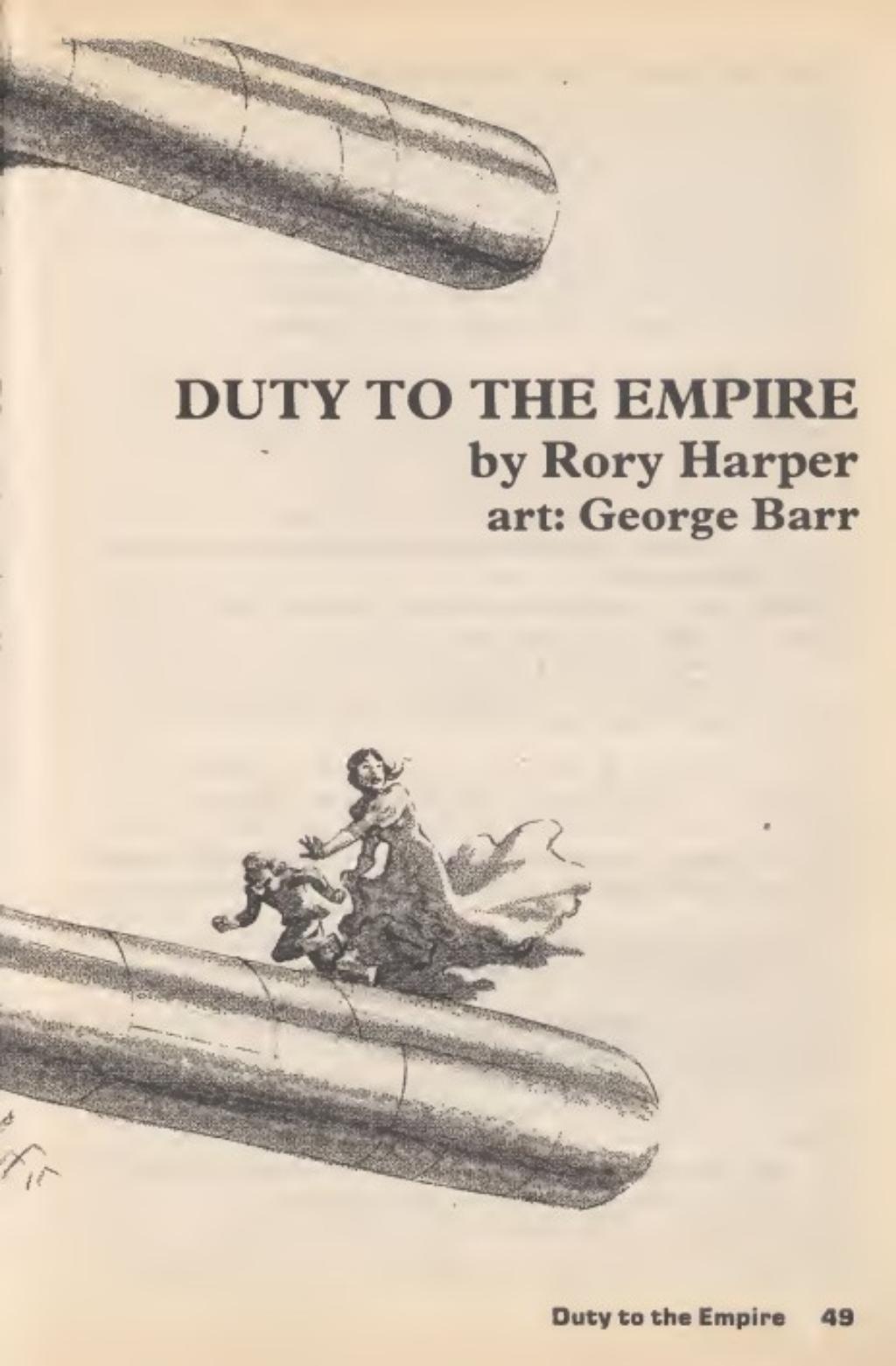
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William Rotsler

Alexis Gilliland



G. Barr - 1982



DUTY TO THE EMPIRE

by Rory Harper

art: George Barr



Mr. Harper tells that he'll be 32 years old when the story sees print. He works for an oilfield services company in Houston (he says he's called oilfield trash, down there). He claims to have found a sure cure for writer's block — buy a computer (in his case, an Osborne I from Xerox, which he unreservedly recommends to writers on tight budgets). It changes the whole process from an agonizing ordeal to something that's actually a Hell of a lot of fun. Obviously, he's contracted a severe case of computerphilia, which isn't yet classified as a mental disorder, but certainly should be.

If Jeffrey had been a responsible Prince of the Realm, he wouldn't have seen his father murdered.

When the vacation palace's power system crashed late in Ulysses's long afternoon, it killed the teacher that was chivvying him through his lessons. In the ensuing confusion he almost escaped out one of the back doors before his mom intercepted him and dragged him, manfully resisting the impulse to squirm and whine, to the already musty library on the ground floor.

She poked through the shelves until she found an exobiology text for herself, then moved to the other side of the room and pulled a book down for him.

"Aww, c'mon, Mom," he growled when he recognized the heavy kryahide-bound volume. "You already made me read that one back on Leone."

"Uh-huh. A second time won't kill you." She pressed the book into his limply extended hands, mock-frowned at him, and marched out of the room.

The book was a supposedly definitive tome on Imperial history, written by Jeffrey's Great-uncle Donald. Gr'uncle was a boring old twit and it was perfectly in character for him to inflict something like this on people. Jeffrey detested most books anyway, since they didn't talk to you. Boring.

He leafed through it for a few minutes, then deposited it on one of the three desks in the crowded library. He already knew most of the junk in it anyway. His ancestors had been among the first settlers in the dense Dorian cluster, three hundred or so years ago. They'd gotten outrageously wealthy by acquiring a huge fleet that traded among the settled systems

of the cluster, undercutting their competitors until they'd gained a virtual monopoly.

When the Three Powers Alliance centered on Old Earth fell apart, leaving a goodly part of humanity to fend for itself, his family had grabbed all the power they could manage, using their trade monopoly to gain control of the economic and political systems of planet after planet. A few generations into the process, one of them, Aloysius I, who even Gr'uncle admitted had a perhaps overinflated view of his own importance, declared himself the King of the Dorian Empire, claiming descent from the royal family of Great Britain, an extinct nation on Old Earth. Somehow he'd made it stick. Big deal.

At the age of ten, Jeffrey wasn't much impressed with the glamour of royalty, having been surrounded by it enough to know that Gr'uncle must have expunged some of the grimier details of empire building and managing from his "definitive history."

He flopped into a bear-claw chair, propped his skinny legs on the ottoman, and glared moodily at the wall in front of him. With the power system out, none of his *good* toys worked, and the walls remained a depressing flat gray, no scenery lighting them to present the illusion that they looked out on deep space or the shores of some sea on a planet he'd never visited or any of the thousand other views that could be projected on command. The only light in the library filtered in through the high windows looking out on the thick woods surrounding the palace.

This whole vacation was turning out to be a very minor experience in his life.

Ulysses was only the fourth planet he'd ever visited. It was located on the edge of the Empire, more than forty hours travel from Leone, and still mostly empty wilderness except for the palace and the small town where the construction crews labored to build the base facilities for the first load of colonists to inhabit in the next year or so.

He had been excited about getting to fly all around it, and maybe see some new animals, and mostly just get away from Buckingham Palace.

Two days ago he'd made certain to be in the control room of *Invincible*, comfortably ensconced on his junior throne, to watch when the shifting, coruscating colors of the painstakingly-bored underspace tunnel vanished abruptly, to be replaced by the green and brown and blue planet appearing poetically in the main forward view-cube.

Kenward, who was captain of *Invincible*, as well as the commanding officer of the Palace Guard, had spoiled the moment by ordering an alert when the sensors detected an unexpected large mass in alarming proximity to the ship. A shock field had trapped Jeffrey on his throne while Kenward sent *Invincible* through a series of evasive maneuvers and targeted the mystery mass with half a dozen nuclear-tipped missiles and

several particle-beam projectors. *Invincible* might be the King's luxury yacht, but she was also a Minerva-class ship of the line, carrying enough weaponry to outfight any three craft in her mass range.

Kenward had returned the ship to normal status only after the mass had been identified by its innocent and, Jeffrey imagined, thoroughly terrified occupants as a cargo carrier bearing a consignment of heavy earth-moving machinery for the construction town.

After questioning them for fifteen minutes, Kenward had grudgingly allotted them an orbital clearance code, which he keyed into the ship's brain. He'd then slotted *Invincible* into geostationary orbit with his usual neatness and efficiency. The whole royal party had loaded into a couple of shuttles and glided down to Ulysses, leaving the ship's brain in control.

Jeffrey's first sight of Ulysses from the ground had been the dusty, primitive landing field next to the construction town, about twenty klicks from the vacation palace. The servants brought from their shuttle all kinds of neat stuff, like underwater skubbs, and sport-floaters, and insulation tents for when they visited the tops of mountains or maybe the poles of Ulysses, on exploring expeditions.

They'd flown to the palace to begin the vacation and Uncle Demaris had shown up that evening with his small party of hangers-on after leaving his ship parked in orbit next to *Invincible*.

Jeffrey hadn't been off the palace grounds since then.

After a few more minutes of mental griping at the treachery of grown-ups, he went to one of the shelves and dragged down a copy of *Tarzan and the Ant Men*, a rare original edition printed on Old Earth and brought at enormous expense, along with the rest of the set, to the vacation palace. An identical set resided in his suite at Buckingham Palace. This was one case where reading the book was better than having the teacher tell it to you.

He had read all of the Jungle Lord's exploits at least twice. Tarzan had it made. He was royalty, too, but nobody could force him to study all the time. He was smart and super-strong and he got to wander around the jungle having all sorts of neat adventures instead.

Jeffrey was smart, too, but he knew everybody worried about him because he was so skinny and little for his age and almost died when he was born. Since he was supposed to be King some day, his mom and the Palace Guard and *everybody* protected him and kept him from doing anything that might be at all dangerous. Or fun.

Just as he was getting into the first chapter the door clicked open behind him. He twisted around in his chair, hurriedly closing the book.

Captain Martin Campanelli, his number one bodyguard, strolled in. He looked a lot like what Jeffrey thought Tarzan would look like, not too tall, but with smooth muscles obvious all over his body underneath his

green and gold uniform. He wore the full uniform all the time and almost looked military in it, but when he was alone with Jeffrey he dropped the parade ground stiffness that the Palace Guard usually affected.

He glanced at the gaudy four-color cover of Jeffrey's book. "Studying hard, I see, Highness," he said, leaning against the doorway.

Jeffrey frowned dramatically. "Mom sent you to mess with me, huh?"

"Yeah. Queen Gloria says you've been screwing off a lot lately. As the Crown Prince, you —"

"Blaaaaah! This is supposed to be a vacation. She makes me study all the time like I was back on Leone!"

"The royal family never has a vacation, Highness, not really." Martin scratched his nose, looking solemn. "She's upstairs studying, too, and King Marshall's been working damn near as hard as he does at Buckingham Palace. When Demaris popped in, it kind of ruined the holiday mood."

He unshouldered his rifle and leaned it against an end table, the barrel notching neatly between the outstretched claws of the oaken griffin perched atop it. "One day you'll be responsible for the welfare of more than five billion people. It's an awesome job. You'll spend most of your life learning it. Not much time to play."

"I never asked to be a Prince!"

Martin grunted unsympathetically. "Sooner or later everybody makes that complaint about their station in life, but nobody ever did get to choose what family they'd be born into. Not even Princes." He stretched out in the chair opposite Jeffrey's and looked meditatively out the window. "Beautiful day. Tell you what. The mood you're in, I don't think you're going to get much effective studying done. How about you take a break for an hour if you promise to bust your head afterward like you're supposed to? The Queen is going to be up in her room and we won't bother to tell her. Maybe the generator will be back on-line by then and you can use your teacher. Okay?"

Jeffrey bounced out of his seat. "Okay!" He ran for the door.

"Hey! Hold up. Where are you going?"

"The jungle, uh, I mean the woods. Out back."

"Need any company?"

"Not really." He noticed Martin's hurt look, but he was young enough, and Prince enough, to not let it change his answer. "Bye, Martin. Thanks."

Martin picked up *Tarzan and the Ant Men* and thumbed it open doubtfully. "I'll cover for you, Highness, but don't push it past an hour. We don't need the Queen aggravated with us both for dereliction of duty."

Jeffrey glanced back guiltily as he crossed the smooth lawn that ended

abruptly with the onset of the woods. When Xenoburo made the rare decision to commit the vast resources necessary for opening up one of the uninhabited planets within the Empire's boundaries, standard procedure always mandated first constructing a residence for the royal family.

It wasn't much of a palace, only forty or fifty rooms, barely enough to house the two dozen or so servants and Palace Guards in attendance, as well as Demaris and his party. The royal family traditionally built in the English style. From the outside it looked like a Victorian manor house.

A high wall studded with detectors and defensive devices had been built around the palace grounds, but other than that the surrounding dense woods had been left in their original state, cool and dark and wondrously tangly, so Jeffrey could slip through them and almost but not quite get lost, all by himself. Not like on Leone, where the Palace Guard followed him around every minute of the day and night. For his own good, of course.

The reminders of his status never ended. He couldn't remember a time when his entire waking life wasn't a carefully orchestrated learning experience, when he wasn't forced constantly to be the Crown Prince, to sit well and smile well and chat politely with ambassadors from other hegemonies and instinctively observe all the intricacies of protocol associated with being the third-highest ranking member of the dynasty that controlled eighty-three inhabited planetary systems.

More, everyone always acted so nauseatingly polite and eager to please him, like he'd have them on the strangling block in an instant if they treated him as a real person instead of as Jeffrey Aloysius Chang MacArthur, Prince of Demastria and Heir Apparent to the Throne of the Dorian Empire.

He knew it would get worse, much worse, when he grew up and became the King. Sometimes he wanted to just scream and run away and hide from everyone.

The Ape Man strode majestically through the tangled jungle, highly trained senses alert to the spoor of the creatures around him as he followed the faint game trail that would have been invisible to any less skilled in the ways of the wild than he. His mighty chest heaved rhythmically as his tireless lopé ate up the miles without effort. The late afternoon sunlight streaming through the treetops dappled his surroundings with intriguing pockets of shadow and brightness.

After awhile he came to a clear, burbling stream. He looked carefully in the pellucid water to make certain that no crocodiles lay in concealment. He'd stripped off his tunic — senseless bindings he wore only out of politeness when in the constricting presence of "civilized" humans — when his keen ears detected

the sound of voices approaching.

He crouched feraly.

Tarmangani! Why had they come to his beloved jungle?

Perhaps to hunt his friend Tantor for his ivory tusks, or to steal the fabled Jewels of Opar. He must track them and learn of their evil plans.

He slipped through the trees as silently as the panther, wishing for the hundredth time that they were the kind with vines hanging from them so that he might swing effortlessly through the air. No matter.

As the Jungle Lord drew near, the voices took on a strange familiarity. He slowed and began to stalk them more carefully.

Jeffrey's father, King Marshall III, spoke in his usual quiet and even tones. When he paused, he was interrupted by a loud voice that Jeffrey recognized to be that of his Uncle Demaris, who was a Prince like Jeffrey, but would never be the King, since he was the younger brother. Uncle Demaris and his father had fought a lot in Parliament this last session. He'd said the reason he'd intruded on their vacation was to get some time alone with his brother to try to resolve their differences. Jeffrey had overheard his mother say she didn't much like Demaris or the tactics he used, but was glad that he was trying to make up with Marshall for the terrible things he'd said. His father was glad, too, Jeffrey thought.

Jeffrey liked Uncle Demaris, even if his mom didn't. He thought she might be a little bit jealous because Demaris looked a lot more like a king than his father did, being tall and handsome, with a beard and a deep rumbling voice, instead of quiet and sort of tired-looking all of the time like his father. What's more, when he'd shown up on Ulysses he'd promised to take Jeffrey on a real hunting expedition before he left.

Uncle Demaris and his father stood facing each other in a small clearing. Kenward leaned against the back of a tree half a dozen meters from them, looking at the blue-green sky as if he were trying to ignore the argument.

Jeffrey quickly slipped behind a tree to keep Kenward from seeing him. Kenward always moved slowly and talked as quietly as Marshall, but his eyes surveyed everything about him constantly. He sometimes reminded Jeffrey of a giant hungry bear that had just come out of hibernation. Jeffrey knew all about bears and animals from different planets because he visited the Imperial Zoo at least once a week.

This looked interesting. Grown-ups always tried to keep you from knowing what was going on and you had to be sneaky if you wanted to stay on top of events.

He squatted and carefully peeped around the edge of the tree. His eyes widened in shock.

Kenward had drawn his pistol. It pointed at his father and Uncle Demaris.

"This is madness, you know," Marshall said, looking calmly at Demaris, as if Kenward were not even with them. Demaris and Kenward carried rifles slung over their shoulders, but Marshall didn't have one. Jeffrey wasn't sure what was happening, but it must be bad. His father, whose face he could see clearly, looked more tired than ever.

"We have no choice," Demaris said. "You refuse to reverse your disastrous policies." He nodded to Kenward. "On the last rotation of the Palace Guard Kenward acquired men who believe as we do. As soon as we return we'll take out the servants and the guards we couldn't replace. The evidence eventually will reveal that the power outage today was the result of sabotage by an infiltrator belonging to the radical arm of the Coramondine Separationists, who then attacked the palace, knowing the ground and air defenses to be inoperative." He paused. "You will have died in the fighting."

"Heroically, I hope," Marshall said wryly. "Gloria and Jeffrey?"

Demaris looked at the ground.

"No! Damn you, they're not involved in this!"

"The only way I can repair the damage you've caused the Empire is to assume the throne."

Abruptly, Marshall turned to Kenward. "How could you involve yourself with this contemptible treason, Allan? Your family has served the throne for four generations."

Kenward hesitated, as if choosing his words carefully. "I am loyal to the Empire and to the royal family, sire," he finally said. "Of which Prince Demaris is a member. I find this conspiracy abominable, and have nothing to gain from it. But your policies are leading to the destruction of the Empire. This year you pressured Parliament into allowing the Coramondines enough autonomy to placate all but the most extreme of them. And your alliance with the InterTrade Compact —"

"The InterTrade Compact is the logical successor to the Three Powers Alliance. We must join in harmony with the other races —"

"I've heard this crap from you for years, Marshall," Demaris said. "You're letting the Empire fall apart over your mushy-headed pursuit of brotherhood with every animal that can scrape up the resources to buy or beg its way into space."

"Parliament and the people don't seem to object too strenuously to my actions," Marshall said mildly. "The Breakup is ending. The tides of history are turning. We can join the InterTrade Compact now, becoming an influential member, or we can arrogantly keep our tiny holdings to ourselves and eventually be assimilated whether we like it or not."

"No! Right now the Compact is weak. We can win a war and take control of it. If we stop you now."

"You can't hold back the tide. You'll only force others to drown in it with you." Marshall looked past Demaris. His features changed not at all, but his eyes locked with Jeffrey's for what seemed to Jeffrey to be hours. Finally he nodded and his gaze swept on.

"Why are you wasting your time talking to me?" he asked with a smile, gently chiding. "You know what you're going to do. Isn't it a bit late for me to say I'll change my policies? Are you waiting to see me beg for my life and those of my wife and child, Demaris?"

His voice had gradually grown stronger, accusing and derogatory. "You've wanted my throne since we were children, haven't you? Now you have the noble excuse. You'll save the Empire! You self-righteous clod!"

Demaris's meaty fists clenched and he took a rigid step forward. Marshall straightened and somehow it seemed to Jeffrey that he suddenly towered over Demaris, regal to the last inch. "You — a king?" he hissed. "Instead, a bad joke, a jealous brat. You skulk about behind me plotting my murder and you can't even kill me yourself. You'll have your pet traitor soil his hands for you. You pitiful, gutless coward! Pah!" he spit full in Demaris's face. Demaris bellowed and charged at him, both arms swinging wildly.

Marshall leaped, not to the side or away, but directly into Demaris's path. His right arm speared out and chopped into Demaris's shoulder just as the needle from Kenward's pistol caught him in the side. He screamed, a high shattering sound, and fell to the earth. A second needle exploded in his cheek.

Demaris ended the stretching silence. "I think he broke my shoulder."

Kenward moved to stand over the body of his fallen king. "We worked out daily. Another second and you would have been dead."

Demaris extended his arm experimentally, winced, and quickly cradled it against his side. "Why did he go for me instead of you? You held the gun on him."

Kenward knelt beside Marshall. "He knew he couldn't take me." Jeffrey had to strain to hear his low voice. "He was already dead. But he could anger you so that you moved inside his kill range." He shook his head. "Your temper will be your death some day, sire, unless you come to master it. I thought I could get him before he reached you, but he moved more rapidly than I've ever seen him. He almost won."

"What?"

"If he'd killed you, the next in line for succession after Jeffrey would be your cousin Richard, who is — ah, unstable. The thought of him on the throne is terrifying. Marshall knew the plan couldn't continue without you. I'd have been forced to abort it and concoct some story about a hunting accident or you killing him before I could stop you. Something.

He died trying to save his family and the Empire as he saw it. He was a brave man." Kenward bowed his head beside Marshall's body, as if in meditation, or prayer.

"He was a fool," Demaris said. "If you knew what he was planning to do, why didn't you shoot him sooner?"

"He didn't have any special talents, as a man or as a ruler, but he always worked as hard as he could. He always *tried*. He deserved to die trying."

"And perhaps you also presumed to teach me a lesson in self-control?" Demaris doubled over and gasped, clutching his shoulder. "Help me back to the palace. Let's finish this mess."

Through their exchange Jeffrey had pressed frozen against the rough bole of the tree. It had happened so fast that he could still hardly believe what he'd seen. *They'd killed his father!* His breathing came in frantic, desperately silent gulps as he tried to think about what he should do. *Run, hide in the jungle. No, no.* After a second he gave up. *Just go tell mom.* She'd know how to stop them. She'd get all the loyal guards together and do something.

He peeked around the tree again. They had turned back toward the palace, Demaris stumbling unsteadily as he leaned against Kenward. Jeffrey ran as quietly as he could through the forest, making a large fearful circle around them.

He was no longer the Lord of the Jungle. Only a terrified ten-year-old boy.

Queen Gloria was enveloped in an overstuffed magenta chair with her book open on her lap, gnawing on a roast *tratha* leg, when he burst into her room out of breath.

He stood panting in the doorway, then finally began to cry, sobbing helplessly. She dropped the *tratha* leg onto the plate on the small table beside the chair and hastily set the book next to it as he catapulted into her lap. Her hands caressed his neck.

"Why, Jeffrey, whatever is the matter? I haven't seen you this upset since your cousin Beatrice threw up on you at your birthday party two years ago." She leaned over to kiss him on the forehead. He twisted away from her and gulped out what he had seen in the forest. The smile on her face died long before he finished.

"Oh, God, Demaris is militant, but this . . . this is insane!" She was silent a few seconds, holding him cradled clumsily in her lap. He was really too big to fit comfortably anymore. Finally she deposited him back on his feet and grasped him by his narrow shoulders. She spoke slowly. "We'll have to cry for your father later, Jeffrey. Right now I need for you to be very brave and help me. All right?"

He nodded and sniffled.

They found Martin still in the library, deeply engrossed in a book with

a gaudy four-color cover. In a dozen sentences Gloria briefed him. Suddenly she swayed and leaned against him. His arms encircled her waist and he gently kissed her cheek. He saw Jeffrey looking at them blank-faced from the doorway and hurriedly straightened and stepped back.

He pulled the pistol from the holster at his hip and handed it to her, then picked up his rifle and checked the magazine, clicking off the safety. "We'll kill them as they emerge from the forest."

They slipped out of the library and turned toward the back of the palace. Jeffrey clutched his mother's hand, the one that didn't hold the pistol, as they padded through the darkened halls. When they turned the last corner, Kenward stood outlined in the doorway with Demaris leaning against him breathing raggedly.

He looked up, animal alert, and quickly stepped away from Demaris, clawing for the pistol at his side. Martin's rifle came up and he fired. The needle hit Demaris's already abused shoulder, throwing him gurgling back onto the lawn. Martin and Jeffrey and Gloria scrambled around the corner, needles from Kenward's gun cratering the wall behind them.

Martin cursed softly. "Damn, damn. Two minutes sooner . . ." He dropped to the floor and snaked around the corner, fired several times rapidly, then slipped back. "Out of sight. Must be behind the furniture. This palace is a death-trap for us now. We have to get out. Come on. With the power out the air defenses won't be able to track us."

They ran for the front of the palace, down the long, cluttered hallways, then skidded through the day room, then into another hallway. Jeffrey heard shouts behind them and the choppy sound of needles exploding. The guards were killing each other now. The front waiting room opened before them. Another guard stood in the middle of it, his rifle slung over his shoulder. Martin shot him before he could move.

Jeffrey hesitated as they ran past the body. "How did you know Bryan was one of them?"

Martin grabbed him by the shoulder and jerked him toward the entrance foyer. "Didn't. Couldn't take the chance."

They burst through the front doors and hurried toward the five floaters parked in front of the palace. Martin wrenched the canopy door up on the one farthest from the palace. "Get in and start the engine."

Gloria shoved Jeffrey onto the far side of the single broad seat, banging him painfully against the opposite door, as Martin went from floater to floater putting needles into the controls of each one.

She engaged the gravity polarizer and turned the floater around just as he finished up and ran back, slamming into the seat, sandwiching Jeffrey in the middle. Silently, the floater glided forward and began to lift. As they came clear of the shielding mass of the other floaters, Martin raised his rifle, shot out the plastic in the upper section of the door on his side,

and began to fire at the front of the palace through the jagged hole. Jeffrey looked over his shoulder.

Kenward stood in front of the gaping doors with his own rifle raised, tracking their flight. The floater jittered with the impact of his needles, then the windshield fragmented, showering them with rounded beads of plastic blown back by the gathering wind. The floater wavered but Gloria fought the controls and it began to climb again. Martin fired steadily throughout.

Kenward fell, one leg crumpling awkwardly beneath him. The rifle flew out of his hands. He crawled toward it and grasped the butt while Martin's needles tore up the earth around him. Two more guards catapulted through the doorway. Jeffrey couldn't see any more over Martin's shoulder as his mom jerked the floater into a steep climb, pressing them into the cushions.

The top of Martin's head exploded, spraying them with blood and grey-blue brains.

The floater's climb abruptly leveled off. The only sound came from the wind.

Jeffrey looked at the body leaning limply against him. Martin's face was distorted, but it hadn't been torn away, not like his father's. He still looked like Martin, not like the faceless monstrosity that Marshall had become in death.

Jeffrey squirmed away, pressing against his mom. Funny, she hadn't cried when she found out his father was dead.

Seen from overhead, four shuttles formed a rough square surrounded by half a dozen warehouses spotted around the edges of the cleared area of the small field. The three gold and green Dorian Empire craft looked diminutive compared to the fourth one, an iridescent silver cargo shuttle nestled against the side of one of the warehouses.

Nothing moved. Probably everyone was working in the construction town half a klick further on, except for the Imperial guard, who should be somewhere close by.

"The guard would have been posted to the palace to help with the murders if he weren't loyal," Gloria said as she pulled the floater down in a tight spiral until it skidded to a stop facing the shuttle that the royal party had arrived in. Her voice was cold as she continued, "We'll get to *Invincible* and take control of her weapons system. When I finish, the land surrounding the palace for five klicks will be one glowing crater."

A deep bass voice called out behind them. "Hoy! In the floater. Keep down!"

Jeffrey heard the by-now terrifyingly familiar sound of explosive needles impacting, a half dozen rocking the floater back and forth. Gloria crouched low in the cab and frantically punched buttons. Nothing hap-

pened. One of the needles must have torn through the body of the floater into the engine.

"Jeffrey, skunch down in the seat a little more." She reached over him and untangled the rifle from Martin's unresisting arms. She stuck the barrel slightly out the door after raising it, preparatory to getting into firing position. Another volley of needles tore into the floater and the rifle spun out of her hands to lie in the dust a few meters away, the barrel warped and split. She slid back in the seat and hugged him tight.

The floater stood exposed in the open. They couldn't run without the guard — it must be the guard who was shooting at them; he hadn't been loyal as she had thought he must be — sending needle after needle into their bodies. Probably the only thing that kept him from just walking up and shooting them was that he didn't know that they weren't armed any more. Or were they?

Forcing himself not to avert his eyes, he shoved Martin's body against the torn door on his side of the floater. He reached under Martin's thigh, where the seat bottom and back intersected, and pulled forth the pistol that his mom had thrown there when she first jumped into the floater and discarded it to monkey with the controls.

She grinned savagely when he handed it to her. "Let him come pry us out of this box, if he can," she whispered. "Nobody goes down easy in this family."

And Jeffrey remembered. His father hadn't let them kill him without a fight.

The Jungle Lord crouched ferally. The constricted space of this damned iron and glass trap irritated him almost beyond constraint. He shrugged his massive shoulders uneasily, the smooth muscles rippling under his bronzed skin, his teeth unconsciously bared in a hunting snarl. Every time he returned to so-called "civilization" he was once more reminded that such ways were not for him. Better to die a clean death in the jungle, than as the result of the tawdry greed and ambition of the corrupted tarmangani prince.

But he wasn't finished yet. Coolly, calmly, his agile mind sought the way that he knew must exist to extricate him from this predicament. If he could escape the clearing he would quickly put an end to the puny tarmangani who dared to menace them. His thoughts were interrupted by a shout.

"In the floater! He's trapped in the airlock of the Dorian shuttle! Get behind the floater and keep it between you and his shuttle!"

Jeffrey looked at his mom. The needles had hit the front of the floater and the voice sounded as though it came from behind them, so it couldn't

belong to whoever was trying to kill them. And it had warned them when they first landed. After trying a long moment she nodded.

"All right!" she called. "Provide covering fire for us! Hold up a minute!" Together they wrestled Martin's body to the floor. Her face was a mask, betraying no feelings at all. Another volley of needles slammed into the flyer when she popped open the door on the side angled slightly away from the Imperial shuttle.

"When I yell, jump out and run behind the floater."

Jeffrey hugged her tight, then let go and squatted on the edge of the seat. "Now!" He scrambled to the ground, his senses hyperalert, waiting for a needle to tear into him. He heard the sounds of needles hitting, but they came from a distance, and then he was hidden safely behind the floater, with his mom beside him.

"Let's go, Jeffrey. Waiting won't improve our situation." The warehouse behind the shuttle looked miles away. He set himself, then ran as fast as his legs would take him. After a dozen steps, the dirt erupted a meter to his left. The floater wasn't shielding him completely. Or was their unknown rescuer one of the traitors, luring him and his mom into the open? Panicked, he glanced behind him and saw her a few paces back, running in a clumsy crab-like fashion as she crouched over and fired the pistol in the direction of the shuttle.

Gasp, he finally reached the stack of crates in front of the warehouse and plunged behind it. A second later she joined him.

"Good! Go through the warehouse and come around! You'll be beside my shuttle!"

The voice now sounded as if it came from about twenty meters to their right. They ran through the cool confines of the warehouse, with crates and mounds of machinery on all sides, threading among the zig-zag aisles. The other door opened on the setting sun. Sure enough, the bulk of the silver cargo shuttle loomed close to the side of the warehouse, interposing itself between them and the Imperial shuttle. A broad loading ramp led from the ground to an airlock a half a dozen meters up, and beneath it a shadowy figure crouched beside one of the landing stabilizers.

It took a step into the light and beckoned them forward. It was huge and non-human. It stood taller than his mom and must have been three meters long, not including the gently swishing tail. It was covered with deep red fur and, judging from the shape of the head and muzzle, was a felinoid, like the lions and *brancks* in the Imperial Zoo. Different from them, though. It had six limbs, whereas the others only possessed four. At least two of the extremities must be arms, since one of the front set held a pistol and it wore a shiny belt from which hung various pouches and tools that would probably be best reached by the front set.

It bared its fangs in greeting as they drew close. "Mazel tov, friends. You are all right?" The words were oddly slurred and accented, as if its

mouth had not evolved to be able to easily articulate all of the words of the Sino-English language. Then Jeffrey realized that its mouth emitted a quiet bass snarl and the voice that he understood came from the region of its chest.

It had apparently followed his startled gawp. The paw not grasping the pistol delicately smoothed fur away from the being's chest, to reveal a gridded oval pressed into its flesh. "Set to speak your dialect. Does good, hah?"

Jeffrey had seen cryptovoxxers before on some of the alien visitors to Buckingham Palace. They were surgically implanted. Thin wires ran under the flesh to connect to the vocalizing apparatus of whatever creature wore one, as well as being plugged into the hearing filters that translated back into the wearer's language the words that the speaker picked up. The royal family didn't use them. Visitors to the court were responsible for making themselves understood, not vice-versa.

They crouched beside the stabilizing fin, occasionally moving back when shots came in their direction. Most of the needles disintegrated harmlessly on the fin.

The cat-like alien told them he was named Beath and was the captain-equivalent of a Sholapurn trader ship, the one that had been delivering the earth-moving machinery to Ulysses when the royal party arrived. The Sholapurn hadn't dealt much with humans, but Beath's ship, *Armsha*, had been passing at a tangent through the Dorian Empire on its way back to their home system, so they'd accepted the cargo to make a little extra profit on their voyage. Jeffrey thought he'd heard of the Sholapurn before, but couldn't remember the location of their sphere of influence. Not close to the Dorian Empire, for sure.

The other two dozen members of *Armsha*'s crew, all Sholapurn also, were already back in the ship circling above Ulysses in geostationary orbit. Beath and his mate and child had just returned from the construction town after receiving final payment for their delivery when they spotted a uniformed man standing over the body of another beside one of the Imperial shuttles. It must have been one of Demaris's retinue, left at the field just in case something went wrong at the palace, as indeed it had.

"Probably Kenward's idea," Gloria muttered. "One of the better tacticians turned out by the War College. Demaris couldn't plan a tea party."

The traitor had probably been signalled from the palace and told to ambush Gloria and Jeffrey when they landed. He'd fired at Beath's party. Beath and his mate, Mersa, fired back, forcing him to take cover inside the Dorian shuttle's airlock. Mersa had gone inside their own shuttle to warm up the gravity polarizer.

"We kill him now," Beath finished. "Mersa will use the body of our big shuttle to knock over the little one." His muzzle swung toward them and

split open to reveal a yawning red pit surrounded by more teeth than Jeffrey had ever wanted to see in one mouth. "Then we go in after him while he's still shaken. Good?"

Jeffrey liked the idea. "Uh, sounds like fun," Gloria said. "But there's a better, safer way." And she explained about *Invincible*.

"Yes, better. That way we make sure to get the ones who killed your family and the one who threatened mine. No chance of bad luck stopping us." They retreated around the edge of the shuttle and scrambled up the ramp leading to the airlock. At the top of the ramp Jeffrey glanced up and spied a glint of metal reflecting the rays of the lowering sun. It came from the direction of the palace. The conspirators must have managed to fix the controls of one of the floaters. He touched his mom on the shoulder but she only shook her head when he pointed it out to her. It was much too late for Demaris and Kenward to prevent their escape, or even to avert their own deaths once Gloria took control of *Invincible*'s weapons system.

Jeffrey turned and followed his mom and Beath into the shuttle.

Apparently Beath's people didn't have much use for furniture. Equipment and screens lined the walls of the wide, high-ceilinged room but it was otherwise bare. A deep musky animal odor thickened the air.

Staring at the screen as her paws danced in the space above the glowing surface of the main control console stood another of the feline aliens, presumably Beath's mate. Her upper torso twisted slightly in their direction and she snarled a sing-song greeting at them. She stood as tall as Beath but seemed much bulkier, thicker around the waist, if that was the proper name for the midsection between her two back sets of limbs. She passed a paw over the console with a stylized twist at the end of the movement. Jeffrey felt a momentary floating sensation as the gravity polarizer engaged. Her paw movements must control some sort of holographically mapped space over the console or something. He thought his teacher had once mentioned some primitive method like that for controlling a ship's brain. Probably hard to learn and much less precise than using a cortical plug.

The largest of the five flat screens above the console showed the landing field falling away from beneath the stern of the shuttle. A floater bounced to a stop next to the one they had abandoned and several men tumbled out of it. Mersa twisted her left paw and the view of the field leaped back up at them. Kenward's massive figure stood out clearly among them. He glanced up in their direction, then hobbled toward the Imperial shuttle as the sniper emerged from the airlock.

The magnified scene blurred abruptly, distorted by air turbulence as the shuttle climbed through the atmosphere of Ulysses. Jeffrey found himself trembling. Kenward's upturned face hadn't displayed knowledge of defeat. It instead was the somber face of the executioner that he'd shown standing beside Marshall's body.

Five minutes later the cargo shuttle cleared atmosphere on a path that would intersect with the three ships that orbited above the landing field. On the screen the ships all seemed to be clustered close to each other, but Jeffrey knew that in reality they were separated by dozens of klicks of vacuum.

Invincible became optically visible as a dim point of light indistinguishable from the other stars, gradually growing to a gleaming green pip.

A voice blatted from a grill set above the large viewscreen. "First warning! You are approaching the control space of a military vehicle of the Dorian Empire. Provide identification or shear away. First warning!"

Invincible's brain allowed no one not in possession of the correct codes to trespass in the volume of space she had been ordered to interdict, much less board her. Only certain people, such as high-ranking Imperial officers or members of the royal family, were assigned individualized codes that would match those stored in the ship's memory. Jeffrey didn't have an entry code yet but of course Kenward and his mom both did.

She spoke slowly, enunciating her words with care. "Identification Delta Niner Niner Charlie Alpha. Gloria Regina. Access stand-by airlock for coupling soonest."

After a second the speaker erupted into sound again. "Identification sequence and voice-print do not match any authorized combination. Second warning! You are approaching the control space of a military vehicle of the Dorian Empire. Provide identification or shear away. Second warning!"

"But that's the right sequence!" Her hand clenched convulsively on Jeffrey's, so that he tugged it loose in pain. She didn't seem to notice.

One of the small screens burped discreetly. "Dorian shuttle clearing exosphere and accelerating," Mersa intoned.

"Kenward! Somehow he managed to penetrate the core of the ship's brain and lock us out!"

"You can't get into your ship?" Beath rumbled.

She turned to him slowly. "No. He'll take control of *Invincible*. He can't afford to leave any witnesses, so he'll burn your ship, and then probably kill everyone on Ulysses, since he has no way of knowing who we've talked to since we escaped the palace. I'm sorry."

She turned back at a snarled wordless exclamation from Mersa. On the screen two round missile ports irised open in the featureless green cylinder.

"Third and last warning! You have entered the control space of a military vehicle of the Dorian Empire. Provide identification or shear away within fifteen seconds. Third and last warning!"

Mersa purred into the grille in front of her. "Shearing away. Refer to Temporary Clearance Roger Four Three Charlie X-ray. Request permission to dock at *Armsha* and depart Ulysses system."

A second later *Invincible*'s missile ports vanished. "Identification code and voice-print match authorized combination. Permission granted to dock at *Armsha* and depart Ulysses system."

Gloria paced forward to the console. "If we can make it back to the surface, we might be able to hide out. We'll be trapped on the planet, of course, but it's our only chance. We should spiral down to the other side so *Invincible* will lose us and —"

"No need," Mersa broke in. "We leave the system in *Armsha* now."

"We have maybe fifteen minutes before Kenward is in control of *Invincible* and her weapons! It will take hours to tunnel through underspace to the next star system, much less all the way back to Leone."

Beath grunted, then licked his whiskers on both sides with a long tongue. "Not to Leone. To Menasha, our home planet. Much farther away, so *Armsha*'s drives have been making a tunnel since we took up orbit. Ready to go now."

They watched the screen intently, right up until the cargo shuttle skidded into the cavernous landing bay of *Armsha*. It looked like the traitors were docking at precisely the same time with *Invincible*.

The shuttle's ramp slapped down and they ran for *Armsha*'s control room. Jeffrey couldn't keep up with the grown-ups, but he got there in time to see Mersa shove a cluster of other Sholapurn away from what must be the ship's control console. It was much larger and more intricate than the one on the shuttle, but still similar. Her paws glided over its surface and the cube that floated unsupported above it displaying the magnified image of *Invincible* instantly split in half, to show on its right side the convoluted three-dimensional zig-zag that represented the tunnel through underspace leading from one bright starting point at the bottom and terminating inside a fuzzy circle near the top. Then the pattern vanished, replaced by columns of figures that Jeffrey couldn't read.

On the left side of the screen half a dozen missile ports suddenly dimpled *Invincible*'s surface.

Mersa's paws moved over the console again. Needles of pure white light erupted from *Invincible*'s skin as the missiles leaped out of their pods and streaked toward them at more than a hundred gravities acceleration.

The screen blanked and the shifting, glowing colors of underspace faded in.

Wire-tight tension flowed out of Jeffrey's body. They were finally safe. The missiles had just gone through the space that they had vacated. They were going to live!

He felt like throwing up.

Suddenly his mother was kneeling beside him, holding him tight, tight, and crying again. He clumsily stoked her hair. "It's okay, mom, it's okay." Gradually he became aware of the aliens shifting uncomfortably

around them. The large control room didn't seem crowded but it must have held more than a dozen of them, each massing more than twice as much as him and his mom together. The musky smell was overpowering.

He saw Mersa turn from the console and squat to the matted floor. Slowly a dark form began to emerge from her posterior region. It fell loose the last few centimeters, rolled over, and shook itself. It was another of the Sholapurn, about three-quarters as large as he. It began to lick its paws and Mersa joined in, her long, broad tongue swiping at its tangled fur.

Finally Jeffrey gave up on trying to think of anything intelligent to say. "Uh . . . Why didn't you tell us she was about to have a baby?"

Beath looked at him, then at Mersa licking the little cat as it wriggled on the floor. A high-pitched whine ululated from his chest, along with those of the other Sholapurn in the room. Finally the noise died down. "Sorry, very sorry. Did not mean to laugh at you." The little cat looked at Jeffrey and winked, which made its face scrunch up ferociously. "Coyce is almost too big, but for another *rawn* or two Mersa will protect him inside her body if danger comes. Survival trait. Too young to fight well, too young to flee well. When the bad human attacked us he went inside. Until now."

Coyce padded over to the group and sat on his haunches in front of Jeffrey. "Greeting." The voice that came from his voxer was clear, higher in pitch than those of his mother and father. "Like humans. Smell good."

Jeffrey bowed politely. Coyce leaned forward and his tongue rasped over Jeffrey's face in a wet sand-paper caress.

"Taste good, too," he pronounced.

A few minutes after showing them into it, the Sholapurn left Jeffrey and Gloria alone in the room provided them for the duration of the trip to Menasha. Barring the control room, which presumably contained delicate and exposed equipment which needed a more sterile environment, the small part of the ship they'd passed through was overgrown with plant life. The floor was thickly carpeted by a spongy matted grass which extended some ways up the curving walls. Small flowering bushes dotted the green sward, with a single large tree dominating the center of the room, its branches spreading extravagantly to obscure most of the high ceiling. An oval screen on one wall looked out on the colors of the underspace, and several other devices whose purposes were unknown to Jeffrey were spotted randomly about, and that was it. Except for the mats the Sholapurn had dragged in and placed next to the bole of the tree when Gloria mentioned that they would appreciate something soft to lie on when they slept.

She looked worn out, as if she were about to collapse.

"They can't get us anymore, can they, Mom?"

"Who — Oh, Demaris and Kenward?" She trudged toward one of the mats and folded onto it. "No. There's no way they can follow us in underspace. They can't get into our tunnel because it collapses behind us. Letting it collapse is what drives the ship forward. We'll be inside it for about nine hundred hours, according to Mersa. And even if they knew where we're going, they couldn't get to Menasha ahead of us. No, we're finally away from them."

"Okay," Jeffrey said. "Later on we can hunt them down and put them on the strangling block in front of the palace."

She stared at him, maybe a little startled by the joy evident in his voice. "I doubt if they'll ever be seen again. They'll probably take the two ships and vanish somewhere so far away that no one will have ever heard of our little empire."

"But that's not fair! They killed father and Martin and they tried to kill us. We'll send out ships to find them!"

"The Galaxy's just too big, Jeffrey. We could deploy the entire navy and never in a hundred years even find their trail. The punishment for them is that they'll for the rest of their lives be on the run, knowing they could have been honored and respected and instead chose the way that made them outcasts from everything that ever mattered to them."

"I'll find some way to get them! If I have to be the king I'll do whatever I want to."

"I think you'll find that being the king means you usually don't get to do anything you want to, only what you have to. It goes with the job."

"Well, maybe I won't be the king then. Father was the king, and they killed him for it. And he never looked happy."

A metallic scratching at the door stopped him from saying more. Coyce stood just outside the open frame.

"Can Jeffrey play? I show him the ship if he wants."

Jeffrey and his mom exchanged looks. "Sure," she said tiredly. "Might be a good idea. Be careful."

"All right, Jeffrey?" Coyce asked when they were out in the corridor.

"Yeah, fine," Jeffrey muttered. The spacious corridors made him feel dwarfed in them and they twisted and turned seemingly at random. Most of the rooms didn't have doors, and several times he glimpsed Sholapurn moving about in them or sleeping under the tree that each seemed to contain, or, in one case, wrestling.

Fascinated, he stopped and watched the titanic struggle. The one on top looked up and greeted him with a wink like the one Jeffrey had gotten from Coyce on their first meeting. He probably was being friendly, but Jeffrey wasn't sure. He hurried past the doorway.

"We going anywhere in particular?"

"Go play. Couple levels are like back home. I show you."

After a few more minutes of walking they came to a thick translucent

green door at the end of a sloping ramp. Through it Jeffrey could see trees with heavy vines hanging from them, thickly undergrown with plants of varying heights and colors, most of them crowded together and intertwining carelessly. A narrow path twisted out of sight after a few meters.

Coyce pawed a bar beside the door and it slid silently upward. Jeffrey stepped through the door after him. It was the jungle he'd dreamed of. Heavy, wet air caused sweat to cover him almost instantly. "Neat, Coyce, this is really neat."

"Huh. Mersa said we have fresh *morka* next meal and I get to catch it. You want to help?"

"*Morka?*"

"Keep them in here, for meat. We're, uh . . . carnivores is word, I think."

They took off together down the game trail.

"You mean we'll go hunting and kill them and eat them? But we don't have any weapons. No guns or anything."

Coyce held up one furry, softly padded forepaw. Half a dozen five-millimeter-long needles sprang from the tips. "*Morkas* stupid grass-eaters, but they can run fast. You help scare one to me. Then . . ." His long tongue slithered into sight and wetly licked his chops. "*Morkas* taste good. Mostly have to eat frozen ship food. Taste good."

Tarzan and Jad-Bal-Ja, the Golden Lion, halted cautiously at the edge of the jungle. Before them the thick, shoulder-high grasses spread outward across the veldt, occasionally broken by taller leafy-branched trees. Their quarry was hidden somewhere among the greenery before them. The Golden Lion paced forward, impatient to be at the hunt.

The Jungle Lord crouched, a low growl rumbling from his mighty chest as his keen nostrils detected the acrid scent of their prey, categorizing it expertly from his intimate knowledge of the ways of the wild. Beside him Jad-Bal-Ja crouched on all fours, grumbling affectionately at his master. The Ape Man understood the language of the beasts so well that his companion might almost have been speaking English.

"Smell *morkas* up ahead, by pond."

"Me, too."

"Huh. Didn't think humans could smell so good. I circle to other side of them. You wait some time, then run at them yelling. They go in different directions, at least one to me."

"Be careful."

"Only need to be quiet."

Jad-Bal-Ja faded from sight through the long saw-toothed grasses, the faint swish of his passing only barely evident even to

the keen ears of the Jungle Lord. He rested on his haunches to await the proper time. It felt good to be away from the reeking cities of the tarmangani, with their artificial and treacherous ways. The warm jungle wind blew gently on his darkly tanned brow as he dug his feet into the moist soil.

He rubbed his naked thigh in anticipation of the rich raw meat that would soon be ripped apart by his strong white teeth, the blood still dripping from it as it was torn from the newly-killed carcass.

When he judged the Golden Lion had been given enough time to position himself, he stood and padded cautiously through the waving grasses. The hunter's total concentration descended upon him as he approached his unwary quarry. The grasses parted and in a small clearing he spied half a dozen of the beasts grazing in a rough semicircle about a small pool of water. Abruptly he emitted a blood-curdling cry and sprang forward.

Amazed and terrified, they jerked confusedly, then vanished into the encircling wall of grass, all six limbs churning madly. Waving his arms and giving forth the hunting roar of the he-lion, the Ape Man charged after them. Ahead he heard a snarling growl and a meaty colliding crunch, followed by a single panicked, high-pitched scream. He loped forward, eager to be in on the kill.

After no more than a dozen strides he came upon Jad-Bal-Ja crouched over a struggling, kicking form, teeth sunk deep in its shoulder, the razored claws pinning the dying beast to the earth as they raked its soft underbelly. One of the thrashing hooves connected with the lion's body and kicked him away. He made a whuffing sound. Weakly, the blood-streaming wapi rose to its feet, but the Ape Man was upon it before it could take a step, his mighty thews locked around its body, his powerfully muscled arms grasping the head and twisting it relentlessly.

At any moment would come the loud crack that signified that the beast's spine had broken, as it struggled uselessly to escape. But in front of the wrestling duo Jad-Bal-Ja rose again and sank his gleaming fangs into its throat. The hapless creature's struggles subsided and it sank to the ground and was still.

The Jungle Lord twisted from under the beast. He towered over his vanquished foe, his mighty chest heaving from his exertions, then placed one foot upon the carcass and raised his face to the heavens preparatory to sending forth across the rolling plains of the veldt the fearsome ringing cry of the victorious bull ape.

"Good, Jeffrey. Didn't kill him clean, but you did good."

Jeffrey suddenly realized how he must look, clothes grimy with blood and dirt and ripped in several places. Altogether very unprincely. He grinned fiercely, one foot still on the dead *morka*. "Yeah, good. I was beginning to wonder if I could ever do anything without somebody to hold my hand and protect me. I bet dinner will taste great."

Jeffrey eagerly eyed the food spread on the slab before him. He and Coyce stood side-by-side, with his mom across from him, and the rest of the crew crowded around the raised wooden slab heaped with cuts of *morka* and various other unidentified foods, presumably from the ship's locker.

The slab was built for grown-up Sholapurn, so Coyce's head barely came level with it, and Jeffrey himself had trouble seeing his mom over the heaps of food. Which was just as well, perhaps. His torn and dirty clothes hadn't impressed her much, but he didn't have anything else to change into.

Beath rumblingly cleared his throat. "Good food and good friends. The best things in life. We have new friends with us for our journey back to Menasha, Queen Gloria and Prince Jeffrey. May our friendship grow and prosper. Eat now." He reached for a steaming *morka* haunch. Sholapurn all around the table followed his example.

Gloria's voice stopped him before he'd taken a bite. "Uh, Beath, we greatly appreciate your hospitality. This dinner certainly looks delicious. But — have your people shared food with humans before?"

"Queen Gloria, do not know for sure. Know that Ambassador Matlock and other humans representing InterTrade Compact signatories live on Menasha, but have never met them."

"I see." Jeffrey looked at the piece of meat he held in his hands. No dining implements had been provided, so he'd been ready to simply bite off a hunk and chew it up. Normal diplomatic practice to follow the customs of your hosts. He'd eaten stranger foods in stranger ways at diplomatic receptions all his life.

His mom caught his eye and he set the cut down on the edge of the slab. The other Sholapurn around the table had remained motionless during the interruption. "A few minutes, Jeffrey."

She delicately bit off a piece of the *morka* meat and began to chew it. Then another. A strange look passed across her face. "Excellent, Beath. My compliments to the chef."

Noisily, the banquet began. Fifteen minutes later she let Jeffrey begin to eat. The meat had an odd, smoky-sweet taste to it. He controlled his face when he glanced up and saw his mom watching him intently.

After the meal they went silently through the ship's vegetated corridors

to their room. Once inside, she turned to him. "It might be a good idea if you went to bed now. I have some business to talk about with Beath, and — "

"Mom, I know about the food."

Her face crumpled.

"I recognized the taste. It was like what we had when we ate at the Book-kaq embassy last year. It's not any good, is it?"

"I hoped you wouldn't know." She leaned against the wall and hung her head. "I thought we'd made it through safe. And now this! Complex organic molecules are put together so they have a left-hand side and a right-hand side, sort of. On Old Earth, where humans evolved, most of them are left-handed. No particular reason, that's just what happened. For the Sholapurn they're right-handed. The food won't hurt us, but because it's built opposite, it'll pass undigested through our bodies. It's like trying to use a screw that's threaded to the left in a hole that's threaded to the right. The two just don't fit together."

"Maybe they've got some other food on board that we can eat, mom."

"Uh-huh. Maybe. That's what I was going to talk to Beath about." She forced a smile. "Don't worry. We'll make it somehow. You get some rest."

But she wouldn't meet his eyes when she left.

Jeffrey drank some water from the cup beside his pallet. At least the water was all right. His stomach still hurt some, but not so bad anymore. He'd been sleeping a lot lately. The dreams were worst of all, worse than the hunger. Demaris and Kenward figured in most of them. Sometimes he woke up screaming.

Before he'd taken to staying in the room all of the time, the Sholapurn had been careful not to eat in front of him. They had tried to make some food for him and his mom out of some chemicals they had in the ship, and he and his mom had tried lots of different kinds of the regular food they had, too. He didn't know much about it, except that she threw up all day when she tried the food they made out of the chemicals. At least he thought that was what happened. He got confused sometimes now and thought he wasn't always remembering stuff the way it really happened.

With an effort, he made his eyes focus when a blurry figure bent over him. His mom's face looked shrunken and grayish, her skin rough and leathery. She hadn't been moving around much either lately, mostly lying on her own pad.

"How are you feeling, Jeffrey?"

It was hard to speak. Took too much effort. "I'm okay. Feel comfortable, kinda floaty." He tried to raise his hand and take hers, but decided it really wasn't worth the work. "How long's it been?"

"More than three hundred hours. Another six or seven hundred or so

to go. I love you."

"Love you, too, mom. I'm not hungry anymore. It'll be okay."

She bent and kissed him on the cheek. "In a while Beath or Mersa will bring you some food that we found. You promise me you'll eat it so you can grow up to be the best king you know how."

He stood up laboriously and began to move away from her.

"Don't go, mommy. You stay and eat with me."

"I can't do that, Jeffrey. Remember that I love you very much. You be a good boy and a good king."

He couldn't keep his eyes open any longer. He was so tired. But he heard her slow footsteps fading away.

Somebody was shaking him gently. He pried one eye open. "Mersa?" Something smelled good, so good his stomach began to ache immediately. The smell came from the bowl she was holding in one paw. She lay down on top of her legs beside his pad and carefully dipped a funny spoonlike utensil into it. He let the soup trickle warmly down his throat.

"Where did — " Suddenly he knew where the food came from that would keep him alive for the rest of the trip. He jerked his head aside so that the next spoonful gouged his cheek and splashed onto his narrow chest.

He hadn't seen Beath on his other side. A silky paw wiped the broth off



his cheek. "Queen Gloria said tell you even kings have to do what their mother tells. You eat or she will be very mad at you."

Jeffrey's stomach churned and rumbled. So hungry. So hungry.

He felt himself going away, somewhere inside, shrinking until there wasn't hardly anything left of him.

The Jungle Lord tossed fitfully on the grass mat inside the rude hut. Through the open entrance he could see the thorn boma that surrounded the village. His thoughts were hazy. Dimly, he remembered being ill for some time, watched over by the silent Golden Lion who'd accompanied him into the lost land. But he must have been found and brought back by the faithful Waziri tribesmen that so loved him. His keen sense of smell drank in the tangy scent of the rich soup held out to him by the gomangani woman. He opened his parched lips —

And stopped. It couldn't be that way. Not anymore. From now on, he could only be King Jeffrey, never again the wild and free Jungle Lord. And kings sometimes had to do things they didn't want to. It went with the job.

Mersa's eyes were wide and sad in her sweet cat-face.

King Jeffrey forced his mouth open again and sipped his mother's love.



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AN INTERVIEW WITH R. A. LAFFERTY

by Darrell Schweitzer

R. A. Lafferty's frequently humorous, often unclassifiable stories have been giving us a unique view of reality since 1960. People who find them hard to comprehend are probably simply unused to a genuinely different viewpoint. Lafferty writes as a conservative Catholic, not a secular liberal, although he does not ignore science or the future. In fact his stories are very much about those subjects. They are the tall tales and folklore of times to come, and some of them might turn out to be more on the mark than today's carefully worked out scientific speculations.

His novels include *Past Master*, *Space Chantey*, *The Reefs of Earth*, *The Flame is Green*, *The Devil is Dead*, *Archipelago*. (These last two are part of a trilogy, the third volume being the as yet unpublished *More Than Melchisedech*.) His collections include *Nine Hundred Grandmothers*, *Strange Doings*, and *Does Anyone Else Have Anything Further to Add?* His nonfiction book, *The Fall of Rome*, is a lot livelier than histories usually are. Most recently published is *Aurelia*, a science-fiction novel (*Starblaze*).

Q: What were you doing before you became a writer?

Lafferty: I worked for an electric wholesaler from the time I was out of high school, with time out for the

Army, and after that for about 35 years. So it's mostly electrical jobbing. All sorts of electrical material I bought. About ten thousand items I kept stock on, and I got to like the business.

Q: What made you take up writing? **Lafferty:** Well, it was just one of those days in the middle of life when I thought I might want to try something else, so I tried it. After a while it started to work.

Q: Didn't you mention somewhere that you were writing poetry before you were writing stories?

Lafferty: I was, but I didn't consider that commercial. Of course I have used a lot of those since then as chapter heads, and little verses I have scattered in. In fact I have used up all the good ones.

Q: How much of your past life comes out in works like *Archipelago*, which has an autobiographical feel to it?

Lafferty: Well, the background is authentic, in the war years and the cities and so forth. Possibly the five characters are composites of people I met along the way. In fact I was at an Army reunion with my old outfit just a month ago, and I recognized several of the guys in the book that I didn't know I had put in quite so definitely. I thought that I was writing fiction, but I found that there was more of the real people in several of those

characters than I realized when I was writing it.

Q: Did you put yourself in it?

Lafferty: Oh, just fragments of me through all the thirty-five and a couple other characters there.

Q: When you started writing, why did you start in science fiction?

Lafferty: Well, I started writing everything. I wrote a *Saturday Evening Post* story and an *American Magazine* story and a *Collier's* story, and some sort of a western story, and science-fiction and mystery stories. I sent them around. The science-fiction story sold and the others didn't, so after several repetitions then, I just wrote science fiction. It took me about a year before I was selling.

Q: You have been quoted as saying that there are periods in science fiction in which all the stories are rotten, with exceptions, and periods in which all the stories are rotten and there are no exceptions, and that we are in a type 2 period at the moment. Why do you think this is so?

Lafferty: I was probably just in a type 2 day when I wrote that. Some days it seems pretty good, and some days it does seem rotten, but so does everything else. It was kind of a subjective judgment. Sometimes there are glimmers of hope for it.

Q: What do you see wrong most of the time?

Lafferty: Most of the time it's just gone down with most of the other fiction. It's not too interesting, and that's the cardinal sin of fiction, of course.

Q: You're somewhat unusual in being one of the few science fiction writers to use religious material. A few touch on it, and there are a lot of fake church stories like *Gather Darkness!* but most writers seem to shy away from the actual substance. Why do you think this is?

Lafferty: Actually, religion is becoming more interesting, more important I believe. I think there's a lag. Most of them just haven't gone to that yet. There's the idea that religion is a drag, and so forth, but that idea is probably several decades out of date.

Q: It seems to me that science fiction often covers all the ground of religion, but does so in a non-religious manner. *Childhood's End*, for example.

Lafferty: Well, I think *Childhood's End* was religious, but that's more the case with fantasy than with science fiction. In fact almost all the high fantasy is really based on the Low Middle Ages of Europe, which is a very religious period. But all the religion is taken out of it, and the background of the Low Middle Ages, the Dark Ages, is used for sword and sorcery. They've taken the motive power out and used the furniture and costuming. I don't know why they did that. They're leaving out the main part.

Q: My experience is that often if a story even touches on such things, the editor will freeze up and think he's being preached at. You can write about, say, Hindu gods with no problem, but if you touch on Christianity, even if all the characters are doubters, the editor

freezes. Have you ever found this to be so?

Lafferty: Yes, that's very much so. But you've got it backwards. The preachers are really those of a religion that is not called a religion, which is secular liberalism. That's really the established religion of our country, and of our world. It doesn't allow too much opposition. Now people who go down the secular liberal line don't want anything that challenges it. Hinduism doesn't challenge it because it is too distant. Christianity does, even Born-Again Christianity and the emotional ones. They have something that the secular liberal world is lacking.

Q: In *Archipelago* you talk about this sort of thing infiltrating real religion. What sort of response did you get from that book on this point?

Lafferty: Well, actually the only response to the book I ever got was from people I knew pretty well, who bought the book early. Now those people were already familiar with my thinking, and they went along with it, but lately I'm getting it from people I don't know, and some of it is kind of strong opposition. And I get some friendly pieces too. I don't know what the result is going to be there.

Q: You've stated that you think this is your best novel. Why do you consider it to be your best?

Lafferty: Well, I don't know. I just caught a lot of things in there. It's not science fiction, although the other parts of the trilogy are. It's really a valid piece of recent history, starting about 1943 and

carrying on for ten years, and implying to carry on for quite a bit later than that, to the present. But it's really, I think, valid, almost modern history.

Q: It does have fantasy tie-ins, at least on a metaphorical level. You're dealing with great mythic archetypes who go out drinking a lot together.

Lafferty: That's a valid part of near-modern history. There's a lot more of those now than there used to be. [Laughs.] Boozy philosophy and so forth. That's become one of the new motive powers, of trying to talk things out anyhow. For better or worse it has.

Q: Have you ever seen any of those drinking stunts done, like the guy who broke the record before the contest, just to get in shape?

Lafferty: No, but I saw the contest itself. That happened.

Q: On a more serious level, what about the idea that science fiction is a form of mythology?

Lafferty: For that matter, science is a form of mythology. Myth isn't something false ordinarily. It's just a way of handling or coming on to a truth. When it can't be direct, there are lots of mythological things in science. They were in there quite a while before science was finally formulated. This is taking us quite far afield.

Q: Is this the reason for science fiction's popularity? It seems to me that if a literature works like mythology, it will push a lot of the reader's subconscious buttons, and it will appeal to him even if he doesn't know why.

Lafferty: Yes, but science is activated by a lot of those subconscious buttons. I was reading Newton himself on his optics last week. He was yawning all the way there. He believed in the corpuscular theory rather than the wave theory. He was actually writing mythology. Yet all his optic diagrams were valid, but his idea of how it worked, the corpuscular theory with little things bouncing around, instead of the wave theory, was wrong. Both are pretty much mythologies, really, because they can't be seen, can't be anything but implied. Radio waves — there's no way you can see them. You just get results from them. They were sort of myths for a long time, with laboratory people trying to find explanations for them. Corpuscular theory, with all these things knocking against each other, coming out with intricate results, is a myth. It'll give you the right answers, but is still wrong.

Q: Whenever you mention myths, the term "archetype" always comes up before too long. Jung's idea, as far as I understand it, was that these images or whatever are shared by all of us in the universal unconscious, and therefore anything which appeals to these will move us, because they're there, whether we understand it or not. Do you think this is the case in fiction involving myth elements?

Lafferty: In fiction, you're hitting it right there when the reader thinks he's the only one who had that thought and hasn't been able to say it. If you have a good one, every reader will have that idea: "That's

what I was thinking and never could say." That is how the universal subconscious works. You may have dredged up something that hits everybody. Then you might miss completely. You might really be the only one who thought that, and leave everybody else blind.

Q: One is tempted to fake it, and make it up so persuasively they all think they did.

Lafferty: Of course you can never know whether they really did or they just think they did. If it rings a bell in there somewhere, there is some resonance that's on the subconscious level or some level.

Q: Speaking of making it all up, what is the relationship between your stories and the traditional tall tale?

Lafferty: I think I got the tall tales from my father, who was a great tall-tale teller. He first came to Oklahoma as a boy, and he homesteaded with these other young fellows. One of them was my mother's brother and one was her cousin, although she was still a girl up in Iowa. They'd each homestead a hundred and sixty acres, and they'd build a shack on the four corners together there. About all they had for entertainment was tall stories. That was repeated so many times on so many frontiers. You get the tall stories of the mountain men and the campers and the trackers and so forth. Well, there's just the basic American stories, and they keep getting handed down. I think I got mine from three master storytellers I happened to be related to.
Q: How much of the traditional

material turns up in your fiction, or do you simply borrow the method?

Lafferty: More method, because the tall story has to be spontaneous. You just start ravelling one out and pretty soon things start to happen in it. Just like an exaggeration, it has to be spontaneous. The method is still there, the attitude to it.

Q: Do you write your short stories the way you would tell a tall tale?

Lafferty: I try to, yeah, but the handwriting gets in the way of it, if you want to put it that way. I think the oral tales are more authentic than the written ones that came later, and I think the oral ones are better. But you can't get them here anymore.

Q: Have you ever tried to tell the story into a tape recorder, then transcribe it?

Lafferty: No, I never tried that, but that's one idea. I told about an oral storyteller in one of my stories, "The Cliffs That Laughed." This was a Malayan. Now that's the only time I've touched that culture, but I guess there's a lot of them in the world yet. The Malays have a professional class of verbal storyteller. Now this particular one was a translator around the army base there. But he could tell them, and that was the way he made his living ordinarily.

Q: There are some Americans who do this on stage. I've encountered a little of it. Have you seen any of it?

Lafferty: Yes, but they're mostly anecdotes rather than stories, aren't they? I don't know. There seems to be a little difference there, or else I haven't heard the good ones. There's

skits and there's anecdotes but I've never heard longer tall tales on stage, although there might well be now. Now that's not the same thing as reading, though, because reading gets a little bit artificial. The tall tale is being put together and told at the same time. It isn't just recited, or something already put together.

Q: Can you use any of this method when writing a longer work, like a novel?

Lafferty: I can try it, and I do it for short periods, but I can't sustain it, which is the main reason my novels are choppy, I guess. They're really just short stories strung together. I never learned the sustained novel very well, and what I do write in it isn't very good. So I was meant to write choppy novels or none at all.

Q: What are your writing methods like?

Lafferty: I'll do it several ways. I'll start a story going till it busts. Then I'll set it aside for maybe six months, and I'll write stuff that's come to my mind about that story in the meantime. Then I may start it at the first again, do some, and it may bust again, and I'll set it aside for another six months to a year. But I've done around two hundred stories and not more than a dozen have I ever gone through without busting for a while.

Q: Can you take the stories that have busted and never recovered and reuse their material?

Lafferty: Most of my best stories have been busted once or twice. Sometimes they're made out of

fragments of several of them. They get the conflicts and contrasts in there that they weren't having when I first tried to write them.

Q: How do you tell when it's going right, when it hasn't busted?

Lafferty: When a story busts, I know it, because I get tired of it myself. I say, "This has gone wrong," and I stop before it goes further wrong. Sometimes I'll tear up the last two or three pages and set it aside, till I go back to where it started to go wrong. When the thing goes sour you can tell it. Especially when it's your own.

Q: Then you have to drop it, because there's nothing you can do?

Lafferty: Let time work on it, which may be the subconscious correcting it to make it back to what you meant to say there. With me it's usually about six months till that happens, though some are longer than that, and I try to forget them but they're still working there. Then I have better luck when I come back.

Q: Do you find that the writing of stories is a spontaneous thing you have to do, and if you don't do it for a while you get uneasy?

Lafferty: Sometimes the start is spontaneous. I get up very early in the morning and start writing like mad for an hour or two, but it's like I've got the thing started then, and I don't worry if it doesn't come the rest of the way. I'll either set it aside or go through slowly on it, or sometimes I'll work on two or three things at a time. I may write a day or two on something, and change to

a different type of thing. But I really haven't ever written two stories quite the same way.

Q: Are you at all influenced by what is being published now in science fiction, either positively or by reacting against it?

Lafferty: No, I don't think I am too much. For a while I was, but it doesn't seem to influence me too much now. I don't know why. It seems like I'm more on my own than I ever was. I guess I get a little bit stubborn about writing my own stuff and not going along with those guys.

Q: Did any editor early in your career shape what you wrote?

Lafferty: No, unless Horace Gold did a little bit. But I actually had less trouble with him than anybody else did. A lot of those old *Galaxy* writers said he gave them fits. He made them change everything, and he'd seldom do that with mine. He did give me some pretty good advice on a couple of them and he was the first one who did. But none of them have changed me very much. The way I write seems to be too stubborn in me to make any real changes in it.

Q: To me this looks like a good thing. Otherwise everybody would write alike.

Lafferty: They say the style is the person, and if he doesn't write his own way, he has an awkward style, which might be, or he has a tedious style if he doesn't, but then if the style is the person there will be bad styles and good styles still coming out. There'll be bad writers and good writers.

Q: Given ideal circumstances, say, that someone has promised to buy the results and not interfere, have you got any projects you would really like to do?

Lafferty: No. I've got a couple things that I'm going to do, but they're not pressing. I'd like to write the last two novels of *The Flame Is Green* series, which I'm going to do someday. The first one is sold and the other two are not sold, so the other two aren't written yet. That's still one of the series I want to finish. There are quite a few things I'm going to finish up someday, but none of them seem real pressing right now.

Q: In a case like *The Flame Is Green*, where the first book is sold and the second isn't, what do you do in the third to make up for the fact that the reader hasn't seen the second? Or do you hope that this will generate interest and get the second published?

Lafferty: Well, that is a difficulty. I hope they'll be bought in series. Now this other series of mine, which consists of *The Devil is Dead*, *Archipelago*, and *More Than Melchizedech* — they're not really a series of novels. They're what I call simultaneous novels. Some of the years are duplicated, but from different viewpoints, and with different characters emphasized. This series was published backwards because *The Devil is Dead* was published ten years before *Archipelago*. But that doesn't make too much conflict. They're not really tied together closely, although the unsold novel, *More Than Melchizedech* does tie

them together considerably.

Q: I have encountered people who claim they don't understand your work. What do you have to say to them?

Lafferty: I don't know. Maybe it doesn't matter if they do or not. I was talking to Barry Malzberg today. We both write a page in a little Italian science fiction magazine, and I told him that his column in that was the first thing of his I ever understood. [Laughs.] He said that I'm as obscure as he is and he's not going to change and I'm not going to change. Yeah, I'm a little bit confusing at times, but I say things as clearly as I can, but sometimes the things themselves are kind of intricate, and maybe it's better not to quite come off with something like that than to come off with easier things.

Q: Do you sometimes get editors insisting that you dilute complex material so the book will be more saleable?

Lafferty: No, the only editors I've ever had that interfered with me were Fred Pohl and Damon Knight, and that was mostly on short stories, although Damon Knight was the editor on *Reefs of Earth*. He was working at Berkley then. No, I haven't had a whole lot of trouble but they don't influence me as much as I think they do. I could put it that way. Sometimes I'll make a few verbal changes and still not change anything.

Q: You mean make a couple of small changes and make them think you've changed something larger?

Lafferty: Yeah. You see, Damon

always has this thing about ending. The ending of the story is the most important thing. Well, maybe it is, but I think that sometimes I wonder. The writer best known for endings was O. Henry, and I was reading through his stories just a little while ago as an experiment, and thinking, "Well, if he stopped that story just before the trick ending." And they're improved. You can come up with about three possible endings in your mind. Some of them are better than his. This cute ending can be overworked. Leave out a little bit there.

Q: In one of his collections there is a story that gets you by surprise in

this context because it *doesn't have a trick ending*.

Lafferty: Ring Lardner did that years ago. A couple of them.

Q: It strikes me as a potentially interesting device. You start the story as if it is to be vast and complicated, and then — you get them.

Lafferty: I don't know if it makes much difference how you end it exactly. In *Archipelago* I ended it up in the air, of course, with everybody shooting at everybody. I'd rather stop right there.

Q: On the subject of endings, I think we're at the end of the tape. Thank you, Mr. Lafferty.



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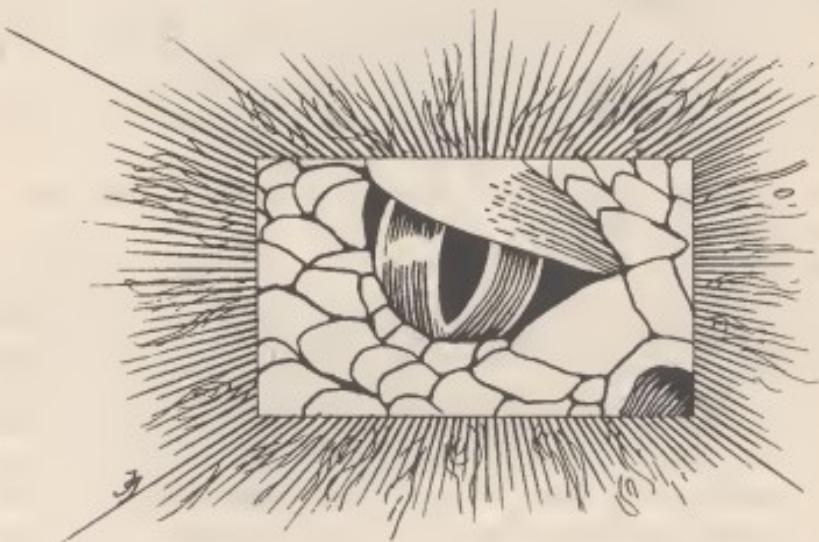
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PINE CASTLE
by R.A. Lafferty
art: Jack Gaughan



This nasty little snapper of a story is the latest from one of the most unique voices in contemporary American fiction. One theory we've heard is that Lafferty has created his own universe, and when it intersects with ours, a story scrapes off, written in a flawlessly baroque style, providing quite unique insights into . . . just about everything.

The most recently published Lafferty book is a novel, Aurelia, available from Starblaze. More Than Melchisedech is forthcoming.

"Why can't we have more light in here?" Stephen Nekros complained. "They keep these barrooms too dark. And the walls are too rough. I've got splinters in my hands from them, or from something."

"No light at all is light enough," came the soft whisky voice of Molly O'Lolly, the unemployed 'Daring Aviatrix.' Her real name was Molly Reed. Molly O'Lolly was only her 'sky name,' her trick-flyer name. "None of us looks like much now when we're down on our luck, so forget about more light. Forget the rough walls too, Stephen. Walls are to prevent things getting in. It's only incidental that they prevent your getting out. The 'Fear of Falling' is what drives me and haunts me all the time. It's the first of the seven archetypal human fears. It's brought me to the rottenest job in the world, that of an out-of-work trick-flyer, but I wouldn't trade it for anything. I have to get sky-high before I go up sky-high. I live in dread and I'll die in dread, but I wouldn't have it any other way."

"There ought to be more light," Stephen said again. "I can't even strike a match, my hands are so clammy."

"The second of the archetypal human fears is the 'Fear of Snakes,' especially of the rampant poisonous snakes such as the diamondback rattlers and the hooded cobras," said Jude Bushmaster, the unemployed snake-handler. "And most fearful of all is meeting one of them in a narrow place where there's no chance of retreating. I'm afraid of all my snakes, but I wouldn't have it any other way. Danger is my whole life, as it will be my death. I'm especially afraid of Diamond Johnny, the biggest of my diamondback rattlers. I have to shoot him with a sedation dart on days when he's especially rampant. But when he wakes up from the sedation he's twice as mean and angry as before. Anybody who's ever caught a whiff of Diamond Johnny would recognize him even in the dark. I'm going to rid myself of him, though. I see a chance where I can get rid of two snakes with one trick. It's tricks like that that make it all worthwhile."

"I have a weight on my chest," Stephen Nekros said doggedly, "and I have an even heavier weight on my mind. I've got to get out of this dark dump and go home. What's the name of this damned tavern anyhow?"

"Pine Castle," said Claud Noyer. "It's the narrowest Castle in the world. I don't know why I come to this place either. It's too confining. Ah, yes, Stephen, they do keep it awful dark here. My nomination for the third of the archetypal human fears is the 'Fear of Drowning or Other Suffocation.' And I would have it otherwise if I could." Claud Noyer, a remarkably powerful man, had been a professional wrestler. But now he could take part only in secret and unauthorized bouts. Two different men had died when wrestling with him, one in the throes of the Japanese Sleep Hold, and the other one in the grip of the Night-Time Choker. But both of these holds are phoney. They look punishing, but nobody could be

harmed by one of them. Not unless it was done on purpose. Nevertheless, two opponents of Claud Noyer had died of strangulation. And two other persons had mysteriously died of choking while Claud was present.

"Why can't we have more light in here?" Stephen Nekros complained again. And then he fell very very silent as though he were also choking. And he *was* choking, on a recollection and realization. "These six persons I am sitting with in the Pine Castle Tavern," he said to himself in utter silence, "are the very six persons that I have wronged more than any others in the world. They all wish me dead, and they are all capable of effecting that wish. What am I doing with this raffish bunch tonight anyhow? I broke with them all some time ago. I will be very very quiet now, and perhaps I can slip away in the dark."

"Fear of the dead, especially of the walking and stalking dead, is the fourth of the archetypal human fears," the magician Gregory the Great boomed in the hollow dark. "Oh, the clammy fear of the stalking dead! But it is better to be the stalker than the one stalked."

The weight on the chest of Stephen Nekros was somehow familiar and quite unpleasant. The weight on his mind consisted of the fact that he had forgotten how he had got into his present vague situation, and the abysmal chilling fear that he might remember it.

"The fifth of the archetypal human fears is the fear of fire, the fear of burning to death, and the concurrent fear of burning *beyond* death," came the purple voice of Niccolo Chort, popularly known as Nick the Devil. "The fear of final Hell and damnation death. I hear regularly from the other side, you know. 'Hell is Hell' say my erstwhile friends who are there. It's pretty bad, and it fulfills all the fears." The mildly sinister Niccolo was the one whom Stephen Nekros had harmed worst of all.

"The sixth of the archetypal human fears is the fear of being murdered," sounded the sandpaper voice of Snake-Eyes Simpson out of the narrow-walled dark. Snake-Eyes was a gambler. He was also a money-lender. In either of these guises he would follow a man all the way to Hell to collect a debt. Snake-Eyes kept a rough pine box in his shabby office, and he sometimes made clients sign for loans or debts on the rough cover of that big, though narrow, box. "You might as well make one sign in blood," one client had spoken in weary humor. "If people had any blood left they'd not come to me," Snake-Eyes had answered. "And you know something, this box is lots rougher on the inside than on the outside."

"What's the seventh of the archetypal human fears, Stephen Nekros?" Molly O'Lolly the daring aviatrix asked in her soft whisky voice. The reason that Molly was unemployed was that Stephen Nekros had seized her airplane for a debt. And when Stephen had then loaned it to a younger rival daring aviatrix to get her started in the trick flying business, Molly had become somewhat sullen about the affair. "What is the seventh fear,

Stephen?"

"I don't know," he said miserably, but perhaps he did know. And in a very soft voice he spoke to ears that didn't belong to any of the six: "Easy, Johnny, easy. I won't move if you won't."

"Wake up, Stephen, and tell us of the seventh fear," the hollow voice of the down-on-his-luck magician Gregory the Great boomed. "You've napped long enough. You've been hoping that this is only a bad dream, and so it is. But don't fly your hopes too high because of that. The wakening will be much worse than the dream. Tell the fear, Stephen, and we promise we won't listen. We're not here, you know, except in your head. None of us is here."

"Except Diamond Johnny," said the voice of Jude Bushmaster the unemployed snake-handler. The reason that some of these persons were unemployed was that Stephen Nekros had seized for debts a small carnival to which they belonged. "Johnny is really here, and you recognize him. Aye, anyone who's ever had a whiff of him will recognize him even in the dark. Did I ever tell you, Stephen, that I know a trick to kill two snakes at once? Oh, both are sedated, in a way. Then we stuff one of them in Snake-Eyes's box, and we set the other one in the middle of his chest. What's the seventh fear, Stephen?"

"Waking up buried alive in a pine-box coffin!" Stephen Nekros croaked, waking up from his troubled dream. And he remembered the six doing him to 'premature' death by the strangling hands of Claud Noyer. He knew that he was six feet under. He knew also that the weight on his chest was the biggest of Jude Bushmaster's diamondback rattlesnakes, Diamond Johnny, nine feet of coiled length and forty pounds of him, cranky at being tranquilized, waking up angry.

Both of them woke up at the same time, buried alive six feet under in the narrow coffin named Pine Castle. They both woke up furious and horrified, and striking out madly.



Art

IL BACIO (IL CHIAVE)

by Tanith Lee

art: Frank Borth

The author is a young Englishwoman who has made a wide and enthusiastic audience for her high fantasy and her science fiction works. The first of these to be published in America was *The Birthgrave*. Since then, she has had about a dozen novels published; has been reprinted several times abroad; has been guest of honour at a number of conventions, including ones in Sweden and Belgium; was given the first August Derleth Memorial Award by the British Fantasy Society for her novel *Death's Master*; and has written both radio plays and TV scripts for some of the BBC's SF series.

The title of this story translates as "The Kiss (The Key)."'

Roma, late in her fifteenth century After the Lord, packed on the banks of her yellow river, had entered that phase of summer known by some as the *Interiore*. This being a kind of pun — an interior place, or — frankly — entrails. It was a fact: Roma, brown and pink and grey and white and beautiful, ripely stank. Before the month was over, there might very possibly be plague.

Once the red cannon-blast of the sunset, however, left the cool garden on the high hill, the dusk began to come with all its tessellated stars, and the only scent was from the grape-vines and the dusty flowers, and the last aromas of the cooked chickens now merely bones on a table. Four men had dined. From their garments and their demeanour it was easy to locate their portion, the noble rich, indolent and at play. They had no thought of plague, even though they had disparagingly discussed it an hour before. They were young, the youth of their era — the oldest not more than twenty years — and in the way of the young knew they would live forever, and in the way of their time, as in the way of all times, understood they might die horribly in a month, or a day. And naturally also, since such profound and simple insight is essentially destructive where too often recognized, they knew nothing of the sort.

There had, very properly, been talk of horses, too, and clothing and politics. Now, with the fruit and the fourth or fifth cups of wine, there came talk of women, and so, consecutively, of gambling.

"But have no fear, Valore, you shall be excluded."

"Shall I? A pity."

"Yes, no doubt. And worse pity to have you more in debt to us than already you are."

"You owe me two hundred ducats, Valore, since the horse-race. Did you forget?"

"No, dearest Stephano. I very much regret it." Valore della Scorpioni leaned back in his chair and smiled upon them with the utmost confidence. Each at the table was fine-looking in his way, but Valore, a torch among candles, far out-shone them and blinded, for good measure, with his light.

His was that unusual and much-admired combination of dark, red hair and pale, amber skin sometimes retained in the frescoes and on the canvasses of masters, a combination later disbelieved as only capable of artificial reproduction. Added to this, a pair of large hazel eyes brought gorgeousness to the patrician face, white teeth blessed it; while all below and beyond the neck showed the excellent results of healthful exercise, good food not consumed in excess, and the arrogant grace evolving upon the rest. In short, a beauty, interesting to either sex, and not less so to himself.

Added to his appearance and aura, however, Valore della Scorpioni had the virtue of an ill-name. His family drew its current rank by bastardy out of an infamous house not unacquainted with the Vatican. As will happen, bad things were said of it, as of its initiator. Untrue as the friends and adorers of Valore knew all such things to be, yet they were not immune to insidious attraction of all such things. No trace of witchcraft or treachery might be seen to mar the young man, scarcely eighteen, who sat godlike in their midst. That he, rich as they, owed money everywhere, was nothing new. It pleased them, perhaps excited them, Stephano, Cesco, Andrea, that this creature was in their debt.

"Well," said Andrea now. "I, for one, have nothing left to put forward on the dice, save my jewels."

"And I," said Valore della Scorpioni, with a flame-quick lightness that alerted them all, "have only *this*."

On the table, then, among the bones, fruit, and wine cups, was set an item of black iron at odds with all. A key. Complex and encrusted, its size alone marked it as the means to some portentous entry.

"Jesu, what's this," Stephano cried, "the way into your lord father's treasury?"

Valore beamed still, lowering his eyes somewhat, giving them ground.

"It's old," said Andrea. "It could unlock a secret route into the catacombs — "

And Cesco, not to be outdone: "No, it is the door to the Pope's wine-cellars, no less. Is it not, Valore?"

The hazel eyes arose. Valore looked at them.

"It is," he said, "the key to a lady's bedchamber."



They exclaimed, between jeering mirth and credulity. They themselves were unsure of which they favoured. The dark was now complete, and the candles on the table gave the only illumination. Caught by these, Valore's beautiful face had acquired a sinister cast, impenetrable and daunting. So they had seen it before, and at such moments the glamour of evil repute, though unbelieved, seemed not far off.

"Come, now," Andrea said at length, when the jibes had gone unanswered. "Whose chamber is it? Some harlot —"

"Not at all," said Valore. He paused again, and allowed them to hang upon his words. "Would I offer you such dross in lieu of honest recompense for my debts?"

"Oh, yes," said Cesco. "Just so you would."

"Then," said Valore, all velvet, "for shame to sit here with such a wretch. Go home, Cesco, I entreat you. I'd not dishonour you further." And when Cesco had finished uneasily protesting, Valore picked up the great black key and turned it in his flexible fingers. "This, sweet friends, fits the lock of one, a lady of high birth. A lady most delectable, who is kindred to me."

They exhibited mirth again, sobered, and stared at him.

Andrea said, "Then truly you make sport here. If she is your kin, you would hardly disgrace her so."

"She's not disgraced. She will not be angry." In utter silence now they gazed on their god. Valore nodded. "I see you doubt her charms. But I will show you. This attends the key." And now there was put on the table a little portrait, ringed by pearls, the whole no bigger than a plum.

One by one, in the yellow candlelight, they took it up and peered at it. And one by one they set it down; and their faces, also oddly-lit, their eyes en-embered, turned strange, unearthly, and lawless.

There was no likelihood the woman in the painting was not kindred of the Scorpion house. Evident in her, as in the young man at the table, was that same unequivocal hair falling about and upon that same succulent skin. The contour of the eyes and of all the features were so similar to Valore's own that it could have been modelled on himself, save for some almost indefinable yet general difference, and a female delicacy absent from the masculine lines of the one who — in the flesh and to the life — sat before them, indisputably a man.

"But," Stephano murmured eventually, "she might be your sister."

"My sisters, as you are aware, Stephano, do not so much resemble me. They are besides raven-haired. Therefore, the lady's not my sister. Nor, to forestall you, my cousin, my mother, any sister of my mother's or my sire's, or even, *per Dio*, any forward daughter of my own. Yet she is kin to me. Yet this key is the key to her chamber. Yet she will not turn away whoever of you may win it at the dice. If any win, save I. If not it is mine, as now mine. I have done."

The fox-lit faces angled to each other.

"An enigma."

"If you wish."

At that moment, one of Andrea Trarra's servants came out into the garden like a ghost. Bending to the master of the feast, the man whispered. Andrea's face underwent a subtle fortuitous alteration. He spoke in assent to the servant, who moved away. Then turning to the company, he dazzled them with the words:

"A fourth guest has just now arrived."

There followed a popular demand as to who this guest might be, formerly unexpected, conceivably unwelcome. Valore did not join in the outcry. He sat, toying with the key, and only stilled his fingers when Andrea announced: "It is one you know of. Di Giudea."

"What do you say?" protested Cesco, flushing. "We must sit at table with a Jew?"

"Not at all," said Andrea placidly, and with a little soft sneer. "Being a Jew, as you note, Olivio di Giudea will not eat with anyone, since the way we prepare our meat and wine is contrary to his religion."

"And even so," said Stephano, "it's not at all certain he's a Jew by blood. He has travelled widely in the East, and is perhaps titled for that. No one, it seems, credits this his real name — I cite 'Olivio' — that does not strike the Judean note."

"I, for one," said Cesco, "resent your act, Andrea, bringing the man upon us in this way. Did you invite him?"

"My house was open to him on his return to Roma. He is an alchemist and a painter of some worth, who has been recognized by the Holy Father himself. Am I to put myself above such social judgements? Besides, I have business with him."

"To cheat money from your countrymen — ever a Jew's business."

"Actually to debate the repair of some frescoes in my villa at Ostia. There is no craftsman like Olivio for such things. The man's a genius."

"He is a *Jew*," said Cesco, and he rose magnificently to his feet, bowing in anger to the table. "Thanks for the pleasant supper, Andrea. I hope to see you again at a more amenable hour."

With a flurry of snatched mantle he strode from the garden and passed in the very doorway a tall straight darkness, to which he paid no heed at all.

"I trust," Andrea said, "no other will take flight."

"Why," said Stephano, "my nicest whore is a Hebrew. It's nothing to me."

"And we should recall, perhaps," added Valore della Scorpioni gently, "that the Christ Himself — "

"No, no, an Egyptian, I do assure you — "

Someone laughed, a quiet and peculiarly sombre laugh, from the

shadow beyond the vines. A man stepped out of the shadow a moment later, and stood before them in the candlelight for their inspection. He was yet smiling faintly, without a trace of bitterness, rage, or shame. It might be true he was of the Judean line, for though he had no mark of what a Roman would deem Semitic, yet he had all the arrogance of the Jew. He carried himself like a prince and looked back at them across a vast distance through the black centres of his eyes. His hair, long and sable, fell below his wide shoulders; he was in all respects of apparel and appurtenance a man of fashion, the swarthy red cloth and snow-white linen hung and moulded on an excellent frame. Nor was there anything vulgar, or even anything simply challenging in his dress. He had not sought to rival the splendours of the aristocracy, rather he seemed uninterested, beyond all such concerns, having perhaps precociously outgrown them, for he appeared not much older than Andrea's twenty years. But there was in Olivio called di Giudea that unforgiveable air of superiority, whether religious or secular, genuine, or false, which had from the time of the Herods — and indeed long before — been the root cause of the hatred towards and the endlessly attempted ruin of the Jewish race.

It was Andrea who was momentarily ill at ease, Stephano who donned an almost servile smirk of condescension. Valore della Scorpioni merely watched.

"Good evening to you, 'ser Olivio," said Andrea. "Be seated. Is there anything I may offer you?"

"I think not, as you will have explained to your guests." The voice of the Judean, if so he was, was firm and clear, and of the same dark flavour as his looks. "Had I known you entertained these gentlemen, my lord, I should not have intruded."

"It's nothing, 'ser Olivio. We had just foundered on the serious matter of a dice-game, and you have saved me from it."

"Not at all." It was Valore who spoke. "Escape is impossible." Valore himself smiled then, into the face of the newcomer, a smile of the most dangerous and luminous seduction imaginable. "And perhaps your friend will join the game, since Cesco was so suddenly called away. Or do you also, sir, omit to gamble, along with all these other omissions?"

Di Giudea moved around the table and sat calmly down in Cesco's emptied place. Another servant had come during the interchange, with more wine. As the jar approached, not glancing at it, the man placed one hand over the vacant cup.

"I gamble," he said quietly, returning the golden regard, seemingly quite resistant to it. "Who can say he lives, and does not?"

Stephano grunted. "But your laws do not bar you from the dice?"

"Which laws are these?"

"The laws of your god."

The Jew seemed partly amused, but with great courtesy he replied,

"The god to whom you refer, my lord, is I believe the father of your own."

There was a small clatter. Valore had tossed the dice on to the table, and now held up the iron key before them all.

"We are playing for this," he said, "and this." And he reached for the portrait of the girl, shifting it till it lay directly in front of di Giudea. "The first gives access to the second."

Stephano swore by the Antichrist. Even Andrea Trarra was provoked and protested.

"The play is open to all your guests," said Valore. "This gentleman is rich; I will accept his bond. And you, sir, do you understand what is offered?"

"Such games were current in this city in the time of the Caesars," di Giudea said, without a hint of excitement or alarm.

"And even then," Valore softly remarked, "my forebears had their booted feet upon the necks of yours."

Di Giudea looked from the portrait back to its owner. The foreigner's face was grave. "There," he said, "is your booted foot. And here, my neck. Should you try to bring them closer, you might find some inconvenience."

Valore said smoothly, "Am I threatened? Do you know me, sir, or my family?"

"The banner of the Scorpion," said the Jew, with a most insulting politeness, "is widely recognized."

"Scorpions," said Valore, "sting."

"And when surrounded by fire," the Jew appended mercilessly, "sting also themselves to death."

Valore gazed under long lids.

"Where is the fire?"

"It's well known, though all its other faculties are acute, the power of observation is, in the scorpion, very poor."

Valore widened his eyes, and now offered no riposte. Andrea and Stephano, who had sat transfixed, broke into a surge of motion. They had been stones a second before, and all the life of the table concentrated at its further end.

"Come," Stephano almost shouted, "if we are to play, let's do it."

"No, no," said Andrea. "I shall abstain. 'Ser Olivio — '

"He plays," said Valore. "Do you not?"

Andrea wriggled like a boy. Olivio di Giudea was immobile, save for the hand that took up the pair of dice.

"I have," he said, "examined your frescoes, my lord Andrea. I regret they are beyond my help, or anyone's."

Andrea's face fell heavily.

Presently, the dice also fell.

The game, now common, next subject to certain innovations of a

pattern more complex and more irritant, grew dependently more heated. The dice rang, chattered, scattered, and gave up their fortunes. The wine ran as the dice ran, in every cup save that adjacent to the chair of the Judean. Stephano waxed drunken and argumentative, Andrea Trarra, as was his way, became withdrawn. On Valore, the wine and the game made no decided impression, though he lost consistently; and it came upon them all, perhaps even upon the sombre and dispassionate intellect of the Jew, that Valore meant this night to lose and to do nothing else. Only the frenzy of the dice went on and on, and then finally and suddenly stopped, as if tired out.

It was almost midnight. The city lay below and about the garden, nearly black as nothingness, touched only here and there by lights of watch or revelry. There was no breeze at all; and far away a bell was ringing, sonorous and dreadful in the silence.

Valore offered the key. Andrea turned from it with a grimace, and Stephano with a curse.

"Well, sir. My noble familiars reject their prize. I must spew ducats for them, at seems. But you, I owe you more now than all the rest. Do you accept the key, and allow its promise to cancel my debt? Or will you be my usurer?"

Olivio de Giudea extended that same strong graceful hand which had sealed off the wine cup and plucked up the dice.

"I will accept the key."

Stephano rounded on him, striking at his arm.

"You forget yourself. *Per Dio!* If he speaks the truth, a lady's honour is at stake — and to be yours, you damned infidel dog!"

The Jew laughed, as once before in the shadow beyond the candlelight, mild and cruel, unhuman as the bell.

It was Valore who leaned across the table, caught Stephano's shirt in his grip and shook the assemblage, linen and man. And Valore's eyes which spat fire, and Valore's lips which said: "You would not take it. If he will, he shall."

And Stephano fell back, grudging and shivering.

Valore got to his feet and gestured to the alien who, rising up, was noticed as some inches the taller.

"I am your guide," Valore said. "Think me the gods' messenger and follow." He put away the portrait in his doublet, and — catching up his mantle — turned without another word to leave Andrea's garden. It was di Giudea who bowed and murmured a farewell. Neither of the remaining men answered him. Only their eyes went after, and lost their quarry as the low-burning candles guttered on their spikes. While in the heart of the city the bell died, and the melancholy of the ebbing night sank down upon the earth.

It appeared the lordly Valore had not brought with him any attendant, and that di Giudea had been of like mind. No torch walked before them; therefore, they traversed the scrambling streets like shadows in that black hour of new-born morning. A leaden moisture seemed to have fallen from the sky, dank but hardly cold; and the stench of the narrower thoroughfares might have disgusted even men well-used to it. Both, however, in the customary manner, were armed, and went unmolested by any mortal thing. So they turned at length on to broader streets, and thus towards a pile of masonry, unlit, its sentinel flambeaux out, that nevertheless proclaimed itself by the escutcheon over its gate as the palace now in the possession of the Scorpioni.

Having gone by the gate, they sought a subsidiary entrance and there passed through into an aisle of fragrant bushes. Another garden, spread under the walls of the palace, lacking form in the moonlessness.

"Keep close, or you may stumble," Valore said with the solicitousness of a perfect host: The first words he had uttered since their setting out. Di Giudea did not, even now, reply. Yet, moving a few steps behind Valore across the unfamiliar land, it seemed his own sense of sight was more acute than that of the scorpion he had mentioned.

Suddenly, under a lingering, extending tree, Valore paused. The second shadow paused also, saying nothing.

"You do not anxiously question me," Valore said, "on where we are going, how soon we shall arrive, if I mean to dupe you, if you are to be set on by my kinsmen — are such things inconsequential to you, Olivio of Judea? Or can it be you trust me?"

After a moment, the other answered him succinctly.

"Your family have left Roma to avoid the heat. A few servants only remain. As to our destination, already I behold it."

"*Sanguigno*," swore Valore softly. "Do you so?"

Some hundred paces away, amid a tangle of myrtles, a paler darkness rose from black foliage to black sky. To one who knew, its shape was evident, for memory filled in what the eyes mislaid. Yet it transpired the foreigner, too, had some knowledge, not only of the departure of the household, but of its environs and architecture left behind.

What stood in the myrtle grove of the Scorpioni garden, long untended, a haunted, eerie place even by day, was an old mausoleum. Such an edifice was not bizarre. In the tradition of the city, many a powerful house retained its dead. The age of the tomb; however, implied it had preceded the advent of the noble bastardy which lifted the Scorpioni to possession of this ground — or, more strange, that the sepulchre had been brought with them from some other spot, a brooding heirloom.

"Come on, then, good follower," said Valore, and led the way over the steep roots of trees, among the sweet-scented myrtles, and so right up to a door bound with black ironwork. A great lock hung there like a spider. It

was but too obvious that the mysterious key belonged to this, and to this alone.

The foreigner did not baulk. He came on, as requested, and stood with Valore, whose fire and gold were gone to soot and silver in the dark.

"A lady's bedchamber," said di Giudea, from which it appeared he divined rather more of the conversation at Andrea's table than supposed.

Valore was not inclined to debate on this.

"So it is. A woman lies sleeping within, as you shall witness, have you but the courage to employ the key. A being as beautiful as her picture, and my kin, as I have said. Nor will she deny you entry to the room, or think herself dishonoured. You will be fascinated, I assure you. It is a marvel of my family, not frequently revealed to strangers."

"Which you yourself," said Olivio di Giudea, "have never ventured to inspect."

"Ah! You have me, messer Jew. But then, I happened upon the key only yesterday. Why deny some friend, also, a chance to see the wonder, which is surely most wonderful if as the parchment describes it."

Di Giudea raised the key and pierced the heavy lock. The awful spider did not resist him, its mechanism grated and surrendered at the insistence of that strong hand. His composure hung about him yet; it was Valore's breath which quickened.

The door swung wide, its iron thorns outstretched to tear the leaves from the myrtles. Beyond, a fearful opening gaped, black past blackness, repellent to any who had ever dreamed of death.

Valore leaned to the earth, arose, and there came the scrape of kindled flame. Candles had been left lying in readiness, and now burst into flower. Colour struck against the void of the mausoleum's mouth, and did it no great harm.

"Take this light. You may hereafter lead the way, *caro*. It is not far."

Di Giudea's eyes, polished by the candle as he received it, seemed without depth or soul; he in his turn had now absorbed a wicked semblance from the slanted glow. It was a season for such things. He did not move.

"Afraid to enter?" Valore mocked, himself brightly gilded again on the night. "Follow me still, then." And with this, walked directly into the slot of the tomb.

It was quite true, he had not previously entered this place. Nor was it fear that had kept him out, though a kind of fear was mingled in his thoughts with other swirlings of diverse sort. Neither pure nor simple were the desires of Valore della Scorpioni, and to some extent, even as he revelled in himself, he remained to himself a mystery. What he asked of this adventure he could not precisely have confessed, but that the advent of the infamous magnetic Jew had quickened everything, of that he was in no doubt.

So, he came into the tomb of which the brown parchment had, in its concise Latin, informed him.

It was a spot immediately conjurable, dressed stone of the antique mode, the light barely dispelling the gloom, yet falling out from his hand upon a slab, and so impelling the young man to advance, to search, to find the curious miracle which the paper had foretold.

"Ah, by the Mass. *Ipssima verba.*"

And thus Olivio di Giudea came on him an instant later, his words still whispering in the breathless air and the candlelight richening as it was doubled on the stone and the face of what lay on that stone.

She was as the portrait had given her, the hair like rose mahogany shining its rays on the unloving pillow, the creamy skin defiled only by the gauzy webs that had clustered too upon her gown of topaz silk, now fragile as a web itself, and all its golden sequins tarnished into green. Her face, her throat, her breast, the long stemmed fingers sheared of rings —these marked her as a girl not more than nineteen years of age, a woman at the fullness and bloom of her nubility. There was about her, too, that indefinable ghastliness associated with recent death. It would have seemed, but for the decay of her garments, that she had been brought here only yesterday. Yet, from her dress, the gathering cobwebs, it had been considerably longer.

"You see," Valore said, very low, "she is as I promised you. Beautiful and rare. Laid out upon her couch. Not chiding, but quiescent. To be enjoyed."

"And you would wake her with a kiss?"

Valore shuddered.

"Perhaps. My reverie is not lawful as I look at her. No holy musings come to me. Her flesh is wholesome, lovely. I would ask her if she went to her bed a virgin. Alas, unpardonable sin."

"You have lain with your sisters. What's one sin more?"

Valore turned to study his companion, but that face had become a shadow upon shadows.

"*Caro*, she is too old to tempt me, after all. Let me tell you what the parchment said of her. Aurena della Scorpioni, for that was her name, unknown in the days of our modesty, lived unwed in her father's house until that year the Eastern Plague fell upon Roma as upon all the world. And before the merciful, if dilatory, angel stood upon the Castel San Angelo to sheathe his dripping sword, shut up in that house, Aurena took the fever of the peste and life passed from her. Having no mark upon her, it was said she had died the needle-death — for they believed, *caro*, that certain Jews had gone about scratching the citizens with poisoned needles . . . And the year of her death is graven there, beneath her feet. You see the candle shine upon it?"

Di Giudea did not speak, but that he had noted the carving was quite

likely. It revealed clearly enough that the pestilence to which the younger man referred was that which would come to be known uniquely as The Death, or the Black Death, and that Aurena della Scorpioni, lying like a fresh-cut rose, had died and been interred almost a century and a half before.

Valore leaned now to the dead girl, close enough for sure to have embraced her. And to her very lips he said, "And are we to believe it?"

The Jew had set his candle in a little niche in the wall, where once maybe a sacred image had been placed, now vanished. As the young man flirted with the corpse, bending close, his long hair mingling with hers and of the self-same shade as hers, di Giudea stood in silence, his tall straight figure partly shrouded in the dark, his arms folded. There was about him a curious air of patience, that and some inexorable and powerful quality having no name. The tomb, with its pledge of death, the miracle that lay there, if miracle it was and not some alchemical trick, each seemed to have left him undisturbed. The younger man sparkled on the dark like a jewel; the Judean was, in some extraordinary way, an emissary and partner of that dark. So that, looking up once more, Valore very nearly started, and might be forgiven for it, as if he had glimpsed the figure of Death himself.

But, "Well," said Valore then, regaining himself in a moment, "what shall we do? Shall we withdraw? I for one am loath to desert her. How long she has endured alone here, unvisited save by beetles, unwooed save by worms. If I could wake her, as you postulate, with a loving kiss — shall I try it, noble pagan? Will you act my brother at this wedding, stay and kiss her, too . . . ?" Olivio di Giudea did not respond, standing on, the shadows like black wings against his back. And Valore offered him again that glorious smile, and put down his beautiful face towards the beautiful face of the dead. The lips met, one pair eager with heat, one passive and cool. Valore della Scorpioni kissed his kindred with great insistence, his mouth fastened on hers as if never to be lifted, his fingers straying, clasping, the smooth flesh of her throat, the loose knot of her fingers on her breast.

The Jew watched him.

Valore raised his head, staring now only at the woman. "Divine madonna," he exclaimed, "beloved, can I not warm you? I must court you further, then — " And now he half lay against the body, taking it in his arms, his eyes blazing like gold coins —

And for the third occasion of that darkness, the Jew laughed.

Valore acknowledged this only by the merest sound, his lips active, his hands at work, his pulses louder in his ears than any laughter.

But in another instant, di Giudea left his post by the wall, breaking the shadows in pieces, and striding to the slab. Here he set a grip like iron on the young man's shoulder and prized him from his employment. With a

slitted gaze, now, breathing as if in a race, Valore looked at him perforce, and found him laughing still, mainly the two eyes glittering like black stones with laughter.

"Your kisses after all, I fear, leave her but too cold," said the Judean.

"Oh, you will do better? Do it. I shall observe you closely and take instruction."

"Firstly," said di Giudea, holding him yet in that awesome iron grip, "I will tell you this much. You rightly suppose she is not dead. She only sleeps. Should she rouse, will you run away?"

"I? I have seen many things done, and stayed to see others. Things even you may never have looked on."

"That I doubt. I am older than you, and much-travelled."

Valore attempted to dislodge the iron vice, and failed. He relaxed, trembling with excitement, anger, a whole host of emotions that charged him with some delicious sense of imminence. Even the punishing hand that held him was, in that moment, not displeasing.

"Do as you wish, and all you wish," said Valore hoarsely. "And you will find me here, obedient."

The Jew showed his white teeth and with a casual violence quite unlooked-for, flung the young man from him and simultaneously from the couch. Valore rolled on the floor and came to rest against the worn stones of one wall. Dazed, he lay there, and from this vantage saw the tall figure of the Judean stoop as he himself had done towards the slab. "You will learn now," the voice said above him, "which kiss it is that wakens." But there was no meeting of the lips. Instead the dark head bent, black hair fell upon white skin, yellow silk. It was the throat di Giudea kissed, and that only for a space of seconds. Then the dark head was lifted, strong and slowly as some preying beast's from a kill, and there, a mark, a blush left behind on the skin, the silk.

Valore ordered himself. He came to his feet and stole back across the tomb, and so beheld, with an elated astonishment, how his shadowy companion milked the broken vessel of the throat with his fingers, smearing them, then pressed these fingers to the lips of the dead. Which quietly, and apparently of their own accord, parted to receive them.

"Take," said di Giudea, the one word a sound like smoke. And the parted lips widened and there came a savage glint of teeth. So Valore had seen a dog maul the hand of its master! Yet the Judean was impassive as this terrible thing occurred, still as the night, until he spoke again, a second word: "Enough." And the mouth slackened, and he drew his fingers away, bloody and appalling, seeming bitten through — The sight of all this sent Valore reeling. He fell against the couch again, full finally of a sensation that prompted him to hilarity or screaming, he was not sure which.

"What now?" he cried, "What now?" Swaying over her, his Aurena,

supported by one hand against the slab, the other fixed on the Jew's wrist. But the question required no answer. Fed by that elixir of blood the Jew had given her, her own, and his, the being that lay before them both began, unconsciously, to awaken. The signs of it were swift, and lacking all complexity. The parted lips drew a breath, the eyelids tensed and unfurled. Two eyes looked out into the world, upon the vault, upon the form of Valore. She had seemed in all else very like him, but those eyes of hers were not his eyes. They were like burnished jets; the eyes, in fact, of Olivio di Giudea.

"She is more beautiful than truth," Valore remarked, staring down at her. "Is it a part of your spell, Oh Magio, to set your own demoniac optics in her head?" But then he began to murmur to her, caressing her face, smiling on her; and she, as if lessoned in such gestures by him, smiled in return.

It was a joy to Valore, a joy founded upon exquisite fear, to feel her hands steal to his waist and seek to pull him to her. His hold on the other man he relinquished, and taking hold instead once more of her, sank down.

The Jew spoke quietly at his back.

"It would seem, locked in her father's house against the coming of the plague, she could not find escape, nor would she prey on her kindred. But she has been hungry a great while and forgotten all such nepotism."

His face buried in Aurena's breast, Valore muttered. It was a name, the name of one who, a legend and a sorcerer, cursed by the Christ to an eternal wandering until Doomsday, when and if it should ever come, was also a Jew; and this persona he awarded Olivio di Giudea now. "Ahasuere."

Di Giudea stood at the door of the tomb, looking upon blackness and a faint threat of greyness in the east, where all the stars went out, and from which all the plagues of the world had come — sickness, sorcery, and religion.

"Ahasuerus? But if I am he, and immortal," the Judean replied, "there must be some reason for it, and some means. Say then, perhaps, my presence at your side tonight also had some reason and some means. You will come to understand, there are other kindred than those of the flesh. And only one race which may safely spurn all the rest."

Valore did not hear this. There was a roaring like a river in his ears, a burning that ran from his neck into his heart. As he lay in her arms, Valore knew it was his blood now she drank. And first it was an intolerable ecstasy, so he clung to her, but soon it passed into a wonderful and spiritual state wherein he floated, free of all heaviness. But at length this too was changed, and he was invaded by a dreadful languor and an iciness and a raging thirst and a searing agony of the limbs and nerves, so that he would have pulled himself away from her. However, by then it was too

late, and helplessly he sprawled upon her till she had drained him.

An emptied wine-skin he lay then, void and dry. The doorway was long-empty also of any other companion, and the door rightly shut against the impending dawn.

Aurena della Scorpioni reclined beneath the coverlet of her victim, her head flung back, her eyes enlarged, her lips curved, smiling still.

Beyond the tomb, the garden and the wall, the city was wakening also, throwing off its stygian sleep.

By noon, some would have asked aloud for Valore, the Scorpion's child, and found him not. It was the same with the clever Judean, he and all his arts and skills and sciences, vanished with and in like manner to the darkness. From those who had supped at Andrea's table and remained, uneasy fancies sprang. As days went by thereafter without clue, there began to be a certain hideous curiosity concerning corpses dredged from the yellow river. But twenty days later the veiled person of plague entered the *Interiore*, and thence the forums, and the markets, and the churches, and the proliferation of the dead ended such speculation.

It was not until the winter came to cleanse the ancient thoroughfares with blades that Andrea Trarra, going one evening into his garden to inspect the frost-crippled vines, was shocked to find a figure there before him.

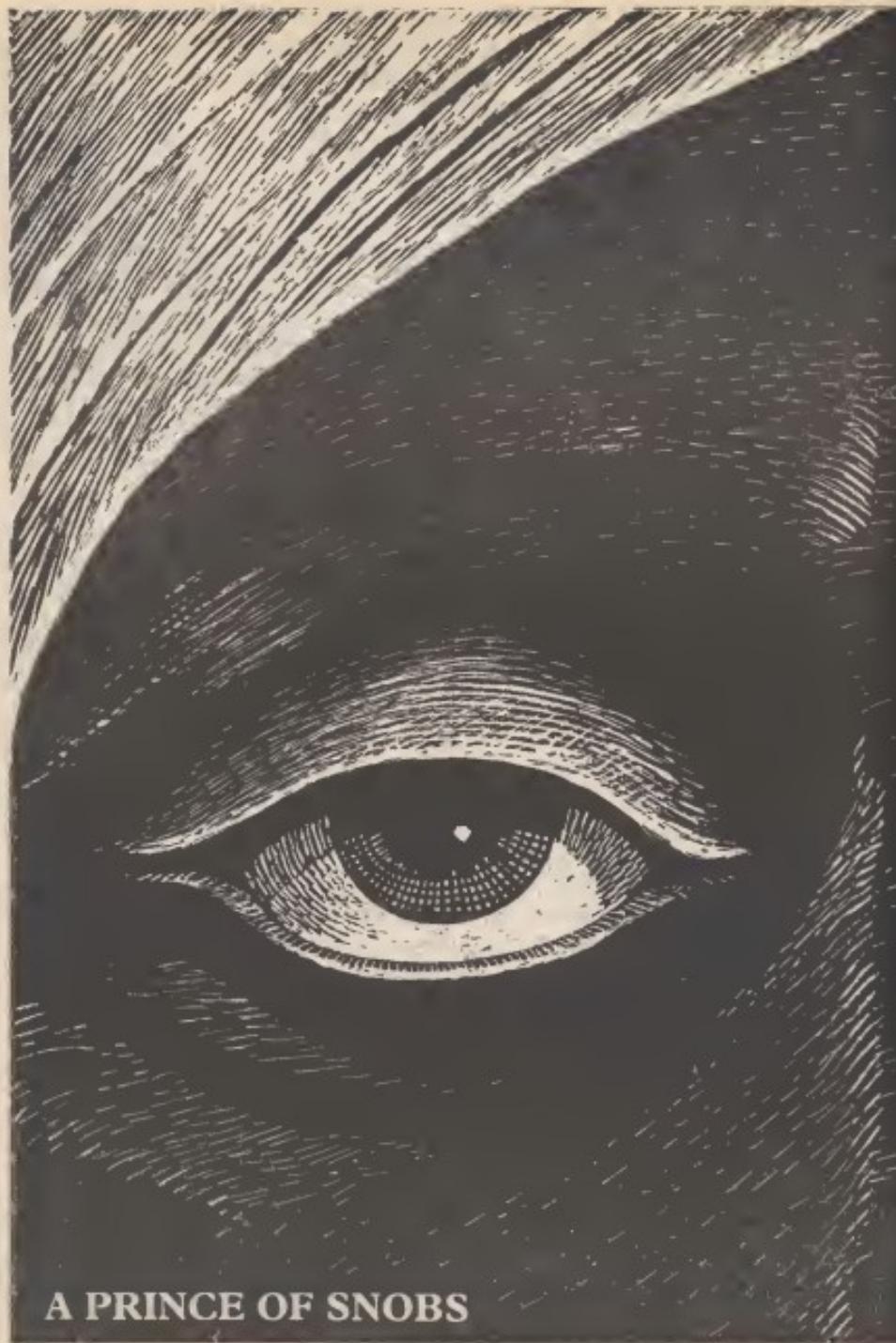
After a moment, recovering somewhat, Andrea stepped briskly forward.

"Valore — where in God's Name — "

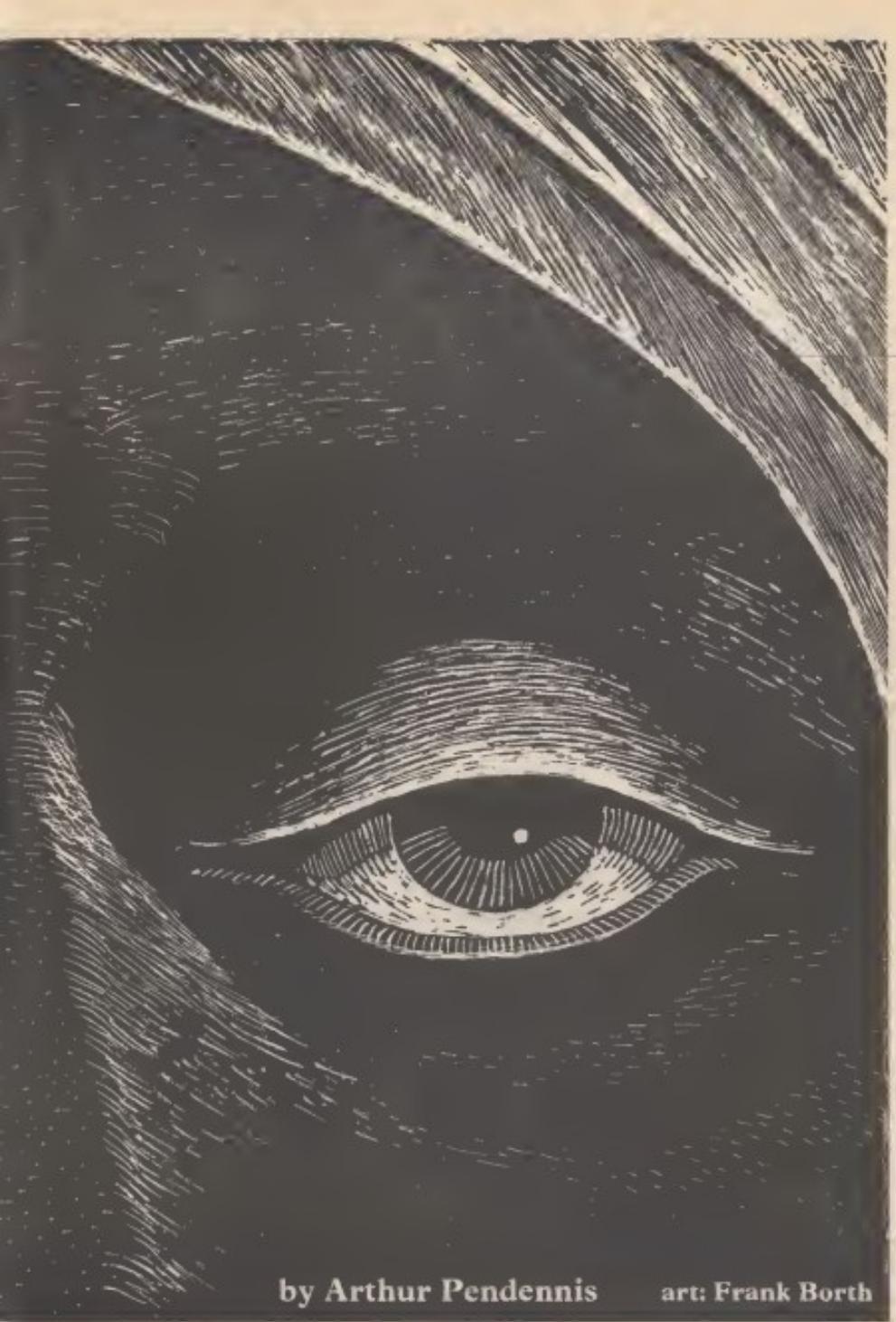
"Ah," said Valore, his face deadly white in the dusk, but beautiful and charming as ever, "I have countless secrets. Do you, for example, remember when we diced for this?" And held up before the other a great key of iron, now no blacker than the centres of his eyes. ◉

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A PRINCE OF SNOBS



by Arthur Pendennis

art: Frank Borth

We present here a curious document: a previously-unpublished narrative — we call it a narrative rather than a story, because it purports to be true — that was evidently written by the nineteenth-century novelist and journalist, Arthur Pendennis. Oddly enough, this name, which was once very famous, is known to modern readers only as the subject of a biography by William Makepeace Thackeray. Few nowadays have even heard of Pendennis's masterpiece, Leaves from the Life-book of Walter Lorraine, and fewer still can say that they have read it.

Limitations of space forbid our describing in any detail how the manuscript came into our hands. It will be enough, perhaps, if we simply reproduce the note, written in the same hand, that was found attached to its pages:

"I shall set down here, as simply and briefly as I can, the events of that terrible night; not for any practical purpose but solely for the relief of my own mind. When I have finished, I will lock the manuscript in a drawer of my desk and throw away the key. If it is published at all, it must be at a time when my reputation for sanity will no long matter to me."

"I could never abide a snob," I said to my friend George Warrington one day not long ago as we passed through the Strand in the neighbourhood of the Adelphi. "A hypocrite, yes. A pharisee . . . well, unlike some others, I won't point the finger of scorn at him. But a snob, never! 'Thou shalt not suffer a snob to live': that should be the Biblical injunction. I know of no greater testimonial to human forbearance than the fact that certain snobs of my acquaintance have never been drowned in the Serpentine or hung from a lamp-post at the corner of Hyde Park.

"But, no doubt, you wonder," I went on . . . though not literally, for I paused at that moment to give a penny to a native of Africa who had been washed up onto our London strand — in other words, to a black crossing-sweeper who had smoothed a way for us among the horse-droppings as we crossed the street. Young Black Jo (as I may call him, for he and I are great friends) respectfully touched his forelock as he pocketed the copper. That is to say, he would have touched it, if he had had a forelock rather than what appeared to be a close-fitting cap of black wool. "But, no doubt," I went on again, as Warrington and I did in fact go on, turning out of the Strand into a quiet side-street, "no doubt, you wonder what brought on this outburst?"

He hazarded a guess. "Young Welbourne?"

"Welbourne?" said I. "Pshaw! 'Illborn' is closer to the mark, unless I am much mistaken. I would be willing to lay a little wager on that,

Warrington. Shall we say ten guineas, if he doesn't turn out to be a lawyer's clerk or a tailor?"

"Done! But aren't you a little hard on him, Pen? He seems a harmless fellow."

"That may be; but he's a snob. A good many persons have sought the acquaintance of Mr. Arthur Pendennis . . ."

"My esteemed companion," said Warrington, whimsically touching his hat.

". . . since the days of his . . . what shall I call it? . . . his notoriety as a novelist, and more especially since his interview with a certain Gracious Lady . . ."

"The Sovereign of this Realm, so aptly named Victoria," said my friend, touching his hat again, though I hope not quite so whimsically.

". . . and I think young Welbourne is one of these gawkers. Do you know that he has smirked so often in response to my little jokes concerning my audience with Her Majesty that I can never look at him without thinking of her. He has positively begun to claim a resemblance to her in the colour of his eyes and the shape of his nose, and in doing that I think he's gotten a little above himself. In short, he doesn't quite know his place and I may have to show it to him."

"Well, you're the man to do it, Pen. Doubtlessly, we shall see him tonight at the Wine Cellar," said Warrington, pausing with his hand on the very doorknob of that establishment as he spoke. The very door-knob . . . I should call it now the fatal doorknob, but in the happy innocence of the moment such a phrase could not have occurred to me. For I did not know then that the Wine Cellar was to witness that evening an instance of snobbery far beyond any ever exhibited by the self-styled Mr. Welbourne, and that that snobbery was to result in deeds both terrible and wonderful: in the actual and threatened loss of human life, in an act of bravery, and in a rescue from what can only be called (incredible as it seems to me, even as I write) a life-in-death.

The Wine Cellar in Maiden Lane is a public house where food, drink, and song may be had at no very great expense. It cannot be said that the clientele is very select. Indeed, it is distinctly catholic, comprising specimens of a wider range of society than you would think likely to find gathered under one roof. You may see there a member of the House of Commons, or of the House of Peers, rubbing elbows with a tradesman, an actor, or even an apothecary. All who have the necessary pence and shillings may step up to the bar, or sit down at a table, and call for hot rum and cold beef. Anyone. I rather suspect that my friend the crossing-sweeper could do so if he should ever collect sufficient pence (which is most unlikely) and if he should be so gracious as to station himself near the door.

Warrington and I had barely seated ourselves when his prediction was made good. Welbourne came sauntering and simpering to our table, and with a bow and a "By your leave, sirs," scraped out a chair. His bow was graceful and his voice well modulated, but there was, as always, something about him that reminded me of a slumming swell; perhaps it was that curious gaze and slight but ever-present ironical smile. I am not certain whether it was the smile or his patterned silk waistcoat that first aroused my aversion, but I felt that both were unforgivable. As for his person, he was a young man of good fair English stock, with a well-made figure. Very likely, he would become bluff and hearty in middle-life . . . if his acquaintance allowed him to live that long.

It was early but the Wine Cellar was already crowded with its motley company. Looking about, I saw sitting not far from us a man whom I know for a certainty to be a dealer in coal. I do not know him socially, so I did not think it necessary that we should exchange amenities, but I really believe that the fellow nodded to me and raised his glass. I inclined my head slightly and turned back to speak to young Welbourne, for I had a few words to say before I sent him on his way . . . but in that moment my eye was caught by someone who quite cast young Welbourne in the shade: eclipsed him completely. It was a man seated not with but near the coal merchant, against the wall and in a corner; a personage whose complexion was as dark as the stuff in which my merchant friend dealt. He was black, so black he might have clambered just then from a dustbin of coal — blacker than that, perhaps. Not for him was the popular injunction to brighten the corner where he sat. He darkened it. The very lamps seemed to stream all their rays towards him in a futile effort to quench his blackness and to grow feeble and flickering in the attempt.

His clothes, however, were not so dark. He was wearing a turban of dazzling whiteness, garnished with a peacock's feather that rose straight from the middle of his brow, being fastened there by a blood-red stone — a ruby, if it weren't a piece of glass. This headgear was touched with romance — one thought immediately of the Arabian Nights and of Haroun Al Raschid — but the rest of his wardrobe was prosaic enough. He was wearing a blue-green coat (not unlike mine) and a cambric shirt. I could glimpse projecting from beneath the table not a cloven hoof but a decidedly commonplace boot and what I took to be unmentionables (like mine) of pepper-and-salt.

All this, the mere outward appearance of this blackbird decked in the borrowed plumage of a peacock, was enough to arrest anyone's wandering attention; but what gripped mine, what held it, was his expression, mien, demeanour, call it what you will. Never have I seen a face so haughty, a manner so superior. Hauteur carved in ebony: such was the essence of his being. His large eyes, which were white, turned in his head; as they roved about the harmonious and smoke-filled room, they seemed

to express an almost unspeakable contempt, as if he had found himself placed, much against his will, in some filthy and degraded gin parlour in Seven Dials.

Those large eyes passed over my face in their dioramic survey. Passed over, yes, but swung back — as if he had recognized in me, if only for that fleeting moment, a Brother Under the Skin . . . and then passed on again, with the most flickering trace of amusement about his mouth and eyes — an amusement that was extinguished by disdain at the very moment of its birth, like a newborn bastard smothered by a shop-girl.

I felt my face burning and knew that it had darkened in feeble imitation of his. But he had forgotten me already. He was watching young Sapling at the bar singing that popular ditty, "The Stout Old Oak," but his face betrayed no enjoyment or even such amusement as might have been compatible with contempt. No; instead, I saw the haughtiness curiously tinged with . . . what was it? Melancholy? Sadness? Despair? Despair, I think. A deep, deep-dyed despair, deeper-dyed, if such a thing were possible, than the black of his skin; a despair deeper than the deepest wine cellar of the Wine Cellar, just as his vaunting pride was loftier than its roof-tops. That despair, that supreme loneliness might have touched me if it were not for the affront offered by that totally unfounded air of superiority . . . and by the snub he had inflicted on me.

Blenkinsop, the waiter, was at the moment refilling our cups.

"Jack," said I, "who is that fascinating person in the corner? — An actor in blackface?"

"No, indeed, sir. He is the Prince de Swah."

Warrington smiled at my perplexed expression. "I think he means 'de Soir' — 'of evening.' In reference, very likely, to his dusky complexion."

"That's right, sir, De Swah. It's a name that's been given him by some of the wits here. He himself has never mentioned his name. He never speaks except to order his food and drink and he always does that, sir, in the most exquisite English. The Queen herself couldn't speak fairer, sir."

Welbourne turned an ironical glance upon me, as if to say, "Here's another opportunity to mention your audience with Her Majesty." I put that down to his account but otherwise ignored it. "And no one objects to his presence here, Jack? After all, there are those who might not care to dine in company with a . . . well! There's a word that I won't use in polite company, such as that present."

"As to that, sir, I couldn't say. But I know the master don't object. The Prince de Swah is very quiet. He never orders much — nothing but ices and gin — but he always pays for them by leaving ten shillings in silver on the table and every eight days a whole sovereign. The master don't object to that, I can tell you!"

"Thank you, Jack. You may leave the pitcher."

"A man of substance, it would seem," said Warrington. "Silver coins, begad, and gold. And what are you trying to do, Pen? Stare the Prince de Soir out of countenance?"

"The Prince of Snobs, I think you mean. My heart never inclined so much to Iago as it does at this moment. But, wait! I have it! He's a lackey brought back from India by some Nabob and who somehow has gotten hold of his master's gold and silver. Very likely, he has cut the throats of his master and mistress — and of the young misses, too — to get it."

"He rubs your fur the wrong way, does he?" asked Welbourne, taking a somewhat regal beak out of his can of ale to do so. "I can understand that. He looks as though he wouldn't deign to look at a king. He's doosid proud."

And I: "Do you remember, Warrington, that book of African travels by your friend — what was his name — the one who was lost at sea? Selkirk? I am thinking of his description of that mighty potentate, King John Man, dressed in an evening coat of English manufacture, a white shirt, a silk high hat . . . and no trowsers. That's what this fine specimen in the corner reminds me of. But I think it a trifle incongruous that he should be wearing that last article of dress. I wonder," I said, turning a significant look about the table, "if he could maintain that absurd air of dignity without them."

Warrington stared and half-rose from his chair. "Speak of the Devil!"

I looked about and saw passing our table a rather shabbily dressed man, but one who nevertheless bore himself very erect. Despite his dirty grey surtout and battered hat he had something of the air of a military man and my first thought was that he had been cashiered out — out of some native regiment, it may be, for he was very brown; but when Warrington hailed him by the name I had just mentioned and he looked about with something of a defiant air, I saw that his eyes were a startling blue. He was a white man, after all, though his complexion had been ruined forever by long exposure to some un-English sun.

It took him a moment to recognize Warrington; and when he had done so, his air of defiance was . . . not dropped, but modified somewhat in deference to an old acquaintance. He came forward and shook Warrington's outstretched hand. My friend hospitably invited him to partake of some beef and ale, an invitation he accepted in a manner that was reserved and yet managed to suggest that he hadn't been oversupplied with either article lately.

"We thought you were drowned," said Warrington.

"So I was," said Captain Selkirk, "but not so thoroughly as were my shipmates. I was always a strong swimmer, as you know, and that must have saved me . . . although, strangely enough, I don't remember swimming, or anything else that happened after our ship broke apart about midnight. The next thing I knew, it was daylight and I was sprawled in

some wet sand, spewing up so much water you would have thought I had swallowed the entire Pacific. When I managed to raise my head, I saw a forest of black legs standing about me. . . .

"You cannot imagine," said the Captain, as he cut his beef, "the despair into which I sank as the days and weeks passed and I realized my situation. Here I was, marooned forever among this savage people. I was the first white man they'd ever seen and possibly the last. I call them savage, although, admittedly, they were gentle enough — they treated *me* with respect: I can assure you of that — but they had all the other qualities we associate with savagery. Don't speak to me," he said, his voice changing as he raised his head to look around at us with eyes that were like chips of polar ice set in that tropical face, "don't speak to me of the Noble Savage. I have seen enough of him in all climes and latitudes to know how laughable is the forced wedding of those words. Hobbes was right: 'Short, nasty and brutal' — that is the only apt description of their lives. I should know; I know them. Habits that are not to be spoken of and barely to be thought of; food so disgusting it would turn your stomach for a week; women, the sight of whose unadorned beauty — and it is always unadorned — would unman you for a month; children swarming like flies and filthier than flies. A horror," he said, "and an abomination that should be wiped from the face of the earth; and, by Jingo, if you gave me the men and the guns and the money, I would do it!"

These were savage sentiments, but the expression that accompanied them outlasted them barely a moment. His face was touched by shadow; or, anyhow, he lowered his eyes and I saw in them, or thought I saw in them, as he sat there among friends and amid laughter, song, and talk, something that was unaccountably forlorn, unspeakably sad, and that aroused in me that curious feeling which our French cousins call *déjà vu*.

He went on, more quietly: "I had had in my pocket when I was washed overboard a little case with my shaving kit in it. I didn't need it for most of the two years I endured on that island. But one morning I took the razor out of the case, anyway — yes, and put it to my throat, even though I had given up shaving. And in that moment I glanced up and saw the white sail on the horizon."

He shook his head and fell upon his beef with renewed ferocity, muttering, "The loss of my ship ruined me. But I expect a judgment soon."

"But what," I said to him, after a silence that had lasted some moments, "what do you say of our friend in the corner there? He has the skin of a savage and the adornments of a noble. Is he not a Noble Savage?"

Captain Selkirk looked about for the object of my remarks, found it, and stared. "I doubt," said he, "that he is an East Indian; his turban is not like that of any tribe I know. His features are not quite African — certainly not those of the West Coast. A South Sea Islander? Perhaps. I

could tell if I could see his hair. Yes," in response to my inquiring look, "I could lay my hand on his woolly pate and say 'Oudh, Orinocco, or Dobu.' I have done so with others before now."

I glanced at Warrington. "Shall we see to that, you and I? Perhaps we can divest him not only of his lower garment but of his upper, as well. Are you game?"

He took a last deep draught of his pipe and laid it aside. "You know I am, Pen. I haven't been in a good brawl since Oxbridge" — a response that might have startled those who didn't know that he had been known at the university as 'Stunning Warrington,' from his habit of rendering bargemen senseless.

I canvassed the others. Welbourne seemed amused but hesitant, as if he didn't quite have the stomach for such an interview. Selkirk was neither amused nor hesitant, but carelessly, or it may be callously, acquiescent.

I signaled to Blenkinsop. "No, not the bill, Jack. I need your assistance in a little joke we mean to play on the Prince de Soir. A harmless prank. There's half a crown in it for you."

The four of us got up from our table after Blenkinsop had whispered rather ostentatiously into our collective ear. We made our way out through a pantry adjacent to the kitchen at the rear of the Wine Cellar, which had still another door opening into a kind of area at the back of the building. I paused at the pantry door and looked back. Blenkinsop was bending to whisper into the turban of the Prince de Soir. It was much too distant for what he said to be audible, even if the noise of the place had not been what it was, but no matter — I knew the gist of it:

"I don't want to alarm you, sir, but we have a little fire in the kitchen. Would you please go out through that door there into the garden? Don't say a word to anyone else. The Landlord don't want a panic."

We mustered our full strength in the garden, as Jack had called it, but which looked to me more like a prison yard. It was about twenty feet by forty feet and was paved with rough flagstones, now very cracked and weedy. At the far end was a wall, marking off the property, so high that the roofs of some low-lying houses barely looked over it. To our left was the side of the building that undoubtedly housed the cheap theatre where *burlettas* and other such extravaganzas were performed and where I had more than once been one of the audience, little dreaming of the farce that would one day be enacted on a nearby open-air stage. The wall was broken only by a door meant to serve as an exit in case of fire, which Warrington now tested and found couldn't be opened from the outside. Opposite, to our right, was another blank surface whose only feature was, high up, a cracked and very dirty window that looked down (or would have looked down, if it had not so obviously been blind) into the yard. In

short, it was a mean-enough place, redeemed only by the open cloudless dark-blue sky above. It was a warm summer evening, and, though past the ninth hour, still light.

"Our guest is taking his time," said Warrington.

"He is insolent," I said, "even when threatened with a conflagration."

"Hush." — This from Welbourne. "Here he is."

And we saw him pausing in the doorway, ducking his turban to get it safely from under the lintel without knocking it off. And yet it was by no means a low doorway. He was tall, much taller than he had seemed when sitting. Warrington and Selkirk are not short men and yet he dwarfed them; and I am not sure that he might not have topped the late Mr. Thackeray by an inch or two. No doubt, the turban gave him an advantage there . . . but that was one that he would soon lose.

As he came out into the yard, Blenkinsop quietly closed and barred the door behind him. The sky, though he didn't know it, was now his only avenue of escape. He gave us his usual negligent glance, stood a moment in indecision, then moved towards the door of the theatre, as if to try it.

"Just a minute, my friend," I said, touching him lightly on the arm. "I think there's a little matter of an accounting. . . ."

He looked back over his shoulder and down at me. "Left sufficient silver to pay the account."

His voice was pitched so high that it was like a child mimicking someone — so much so that for a moment I was unthinkingly freshly offended.

"I was speaking," I said, with a gesture that betrayed some irritation, "of quite another account than one for gin and sherbert. There's a little reckoning to be paid to the four of us here. . . ."

"Ahh," he said, looking us over without the slightest trace of apprehension and still speaking in that child's voice, "I believe that this is what is called 'an extortion.' Here," and he reached into his coat pocket, removed something, and dropped it, clinking, into my still-outstretched hand. Looking down, I saw several silver coins in my palm. "Now go," said the black man, turning away with a slow, dismissive wave of his hand, "and trouble me no longer. There are no more where those came from; they are the last . . . the last."

"You scoundrel!" I cried, flinging the coins violently aside, so that they rang upon the flagstones. "Do you think that I am a beggar like your father and mother? Do you think that you can insult a gentleman, a white man, an Englishman in his own country? You have a reckoning to pay, indeed! The airs you have given yourself are intolerable, your costume is an affront, your manners deserve a whipping and by G—, you'll get it before I'm through with you!"

I slapped his face with my open hand, though I had to stand on my toes to do it. "Warrington! Selkirk!" I shouted, with a not unpleasant heat,

"give me a hand here!" — and in a trice we had him wallowing on his back on the ground and I was tugging his salt-and-pepper pantaloons off him. In the matter of legs he held no surprises, unless it was that they were so unlike the bandy legs of Young Black Jo. His, though of the wrong colour, were long and well-muscled. He was strong and might have gotten up, even against the weight of the four of us — or of the three, for Welbourne hung back — except that we had thrown ourselves upon him with a vehemence that surprised him (Selkirk cursing with a vehemence that surprised me). I flung his trowsers aside, with a laugh, into the dirt.

He had been taken unawares; but now he began to struggle fiercely, slapping with his open hand (in emulation, it may be, of my opening blow) as Warrington and his friend attempted to strip the turban from his head. But there was no unwinding it, even after Warrington had plucked the feather and that horrible blood-drop ruby from it. The explorer suddenly flashed a razor — it may have been the very same razor that he had meant for his own throat some weeks or months before: — an action that sent a shock through my body as if it had been struck a blow; for, despite my rage, I had intended the black man no injury (I swear it!) except to his pride. But what Selkirk had in mind, I divined next moment, was to cut one of the bands of the turban. But that was unnecessary: —Warrington wrenched the turban off in one piece and flung it aside, where it rolled some distance away lopsidedly, like a crippled ball.

It was then that I received a shock to which the small jolt I had just had was as nothing.

No, it seemed that Selkirk would not lay his hand upon this man's woolly pate and say, "Orinocco or Oudh," as the case might be. For there was no wool upon his pate but, rather, thick strands of something that glistened like silver, strands perhaps an eighth of an inch thick and six or seven inches long. "*What in the world . . . !*" I suppose they looked like nothing in this world, really, or like nothing I had seen before . . . but I thought of the unearthed roots of small plants, of the palps of sea-blossoms and, more disgustingly, of worms.

It was a head like that of the Medusa. That thought leaped simultaneously, I am sure, into all our minds and we were for the moment turned to stone, as in the legend. Both Warrington and Selkirk were frozen with one hand each on a shoulder of the fallen man. He had no hair. That's why he had worn the turban. He was a monster, a mistake of nature, one rightly belonging to a freak show or humanely hidden away in some private institution. That explained (didn't it?) his aloofness, his isolation, his pathetic overweening pride. It explained too the deep-dyed, the almost mad, despair as he looked about at the gay and carefree revellers of the Wine Cellar. Imagine . . . imagine being a Negro in our modern London and having that added cause for shame! And we had done this to

him; we had exposed his secret cruelly to the world. I felt a pang of mortification (what would Laura say if she knew?) and saw a queer and guilty look on Warrington's face. But Selkirk was made of sterner stuff — his sunburnt complexion and hard-clamped visage betrayed no slightest qualm or misgiving.

It was a shock, too, to our victim. He had had a long black index finger raised, as if to primly remonstrate with us; but this exposure froze him, struck him dumb. He looked from one to the other of us, gauging our reactions — and in that instant saw the razor in Selkirk's hand. I guessed the thought that flashed through his mind: that that dangerous man meant to trim the tendrils that sprouted from his head. His eyes widened, his mouth fell open, *and the tendrils crawled, writhed in a frenzy of horripilation*. I felt the hair on my own head stir, as if in sympathy.

But that wasn't the last of the surprises.

For that upraised, chiding finger suddenly ejaculated blue flame. I saw it. A streak of fire stretched upwards, a streak perhaps only half an inch thick but reaching away miles (it seemed) into the darkening sky above us. There was a hissing noise, as of frying air — that was my impression; and then the flame had gone, leaving a strange after-image lingering on the eye and faint blue and yellow light flickering for a moment about the nail of the upraised finger.

Warrington had dropped his hand and had stepped back, staring, when the man's hair had moved of its own will; but the obstinate Selkirk had kept his bulldog grip. He now raised the razor in his other hand. Why, I don't know. Perhaps the gesture had no meaning. I only know that I had, next moment, an impression of flame spattering from Selkirk's left shoulder. He cried out hoarsely and reeled away, dropping the razor with a clink to the flagstones. He sank to the stones himself, holding his shoulder. White and grey wisps of smoke curled from between his fingers and the air was tainted with the smell of burnt cloth . . . and with something else, much like an overdone roast from the kitchen behind us.

The Prince de Soir got to his feet. I would have said that he scrambled to his feet, except that he somehow managed to do so with a certain dignity. He stood facing us from some ten feet away on those black columns of legs and with those horrible strands stirring on his scalp . . . though, as we watched, we saw them gradually stilling and lying quiescent, as if he were now calm and composed. His face had regained its wonted lofty look; and I could not but notice that this gave him, despite his naked legs and monstrous hair, a certain nobility of countenance.

He looked us over. He raised an eyebrow . . . and his index finger (which I now saw was at least an inch longer than it should have been) and again that line of fire sizzled and etched its way into the London blue . . . again . . . and again, as a man might raise a pistol to fire three warning shots.

We understood him. But we saw Selkirk struggling up from the flagstones, his face bathed in sweat. His voice grated from between his clenched teeth: "Kill it! It's not from Orinocco or from Oudh!" And his hand groped for the razor on the broken ground, his pain-maddened eyes never leaving those of the black man. The Prince de Soir, with that now-familiar touch of sadness, seemed to point out to us what Selkirk was doing there . . . and blue flame spattered outward (my eyes told me) from Selkirk's chest. He pitched over backwards, thrashed wildly some three or four times, and lay still. The smoke and smell of burnt cloth and flesh again suffused the air, like tea-leaves in water.

We turned back to the black man with oaths and incoherent protestations. He shook his head, smiling sadly, and pointed that accusatory finger at us, as if to reprove us.

"Be so good," he mimicked, "as to raise no outcry. I regret that I must anticipate your cessations."

I may be mistaken — I hope I am — but I sensed a movement as if Welbourne had gotten behind me for protection. But whether I am or not, of one thing I am certain and will remember as long as I live: and that is that Warrington stepped in front of me, to shield me from the blue flame.

But the blue flame didn't come. The Prince de Soir hung fire. I could see him, for I moved, and saw that he saw Warrington's brave action. His smile deepened until it seemed almost tender. Then, tilting back his head slowly, he raised his hand and gouged that too-long finger into his neck, pointing upward, just where the chin meets the throat.

We watched, fascinated, knowing what to expect: the sputtering, searing fire, the involuntary gasp, the tall figure toppling to the ground. But that too didn't come. He stood with his face raised to the open sky, that hair tilted out of sight, the blunt finger at his throat like a razor. I thought for a moment that he was trying to work up his courage to the fatal act, but knew, somehow, that that could not be.

No, it could not be. He was listening. . . . And I heard a music, a whistling and tinkling, very thin and faint, which I first thought was coming from the theatre close at hand . . . but that couldn't be, either, for it was a melody never heard on land or sea; weirdly discordant, or else faltering and fragmentary, and yet almost celestial in its sweetness. Quite celestial: for it came from the sky.

His eyes were already raised to the darkening blue fields of air above us, and we, looking up, saw high above there, a glittering mote. It was a coloured object, red and blue, preternaturally bright, as if it were still catching the last rays of the sun. We saw, as it drifted or fell towards us, that it was round; and my first impression was that it was a balloon, one that had escaped from a child; but I soon made out that it was no toy. If it

were a balloon at all, it must be that of an aerialist, for it was very large.

The effect upon our black friend was something to see. He had quite lost his insolent composure. His lips moved, as if he were speaking incredulously under his breath; his eyes stared; and that deadly finger hung poised, trembling and wavering, at his throat. *That*, I thought, must have been Selkirk's expression when he looked up that morning on the bamboo isle and saw the white sail on the horizon.

The balloon sank nearer. I say balloon, but there was no gondola, no ropes, no weights or ballast, no visible pilot; it was in fact not even consistently round. Not only did the red and blue pattern of its surface simmer and shift, but the thing itself seemed to change shape, so that it was now spherical, now ovoid or obloid. It was only about ten feet in diameter, and it came down quickly and smoothly, as though it were sinking through water. We shrank back as it dropped below the level of the roofs about us, but we were in no danger of being crushed. It touched the ground without a sound. The seamless surface split open noiselessly, top to bottom, like an over-ripe pomegranate, and gaped.

A man stood just inside the opening, inside a tent. He stepped forth into the yard — a black man, like the Prince de Soir. So like him that he might have been his brother, though he was not similarly attired. Truth to tell, he was not attired at all. He was adorned only by the beansprout-like tendrils on his head and by two stars, one blazing upon each shoulder like an epaulette. If you have believed me so far, you will not baulk at this; or so I hope, for I have something to tell you that is more incredible yet — and that is that the balloon, or tent, or shell, whatever it was, was larger inside than out. Looking into it, past the man with the blazing epaulettes, we saw other men like him busily but obscurely at work upon looms that sang as they shuttled — for they were the source of the weird melody that now filled the yard — men who might have been wool-carders, judging by the perforated cards they shuffled and dexterously dealt. But, more than that, we saw on the far side of the room, *some twenty feet away*, an open door and a great window through which we also looked — looked out upon a city of red and blue and green towers and pinnacles of thrilling disorderly shapes, and beyond them, miles beyond them, for the room seemed to be in a high tower or perhaps resting on a mountain peak, to where a blue-green sea washed silently upon a white beach. Standing where we were, among the dirt and broken flagstones of the shadowy yard, pent in by the unsightly backs of houses, we suddenly found ourselves looking out upon a wide prospect bathed in morning and we reeled and staggered as if the very earth had shifted beneath us.

The newcomer must have seen us — and Selkirk's twisted body lying almost at his feet — but he paid us no heed. He turned his face to the Prince de Soir. That man, the object of our ignorant scorn, walked towards him, his arms held wide as in an ecstasy of wonderment and joy,

his face bathed with the tears that gushed from his eyes — gushed as if they would wash away, not the sooty ash of his skin, but the years of loneliness. We saw him step past the other and through the opening, walk past the men at the singing looms to the door at the far side of the room. He stepped through it into that ultra-mondaine world, turned to one side, and with a cry of joy vanished from our sight.

We were left in the company of the man with the stars. He looked us over, then turned his face to where his countryman's contorted and humiliated trowsers lay in the common dirt. He smiled, though barely. He seemed to know. He looked back at us; his eyes widened; the twin thistles of light blazing on his shoulders pulsed and shot out dazzling beams. We reeled again and cried out, our hands over our eyes; and then, dropping my hands, I looked down suddenly, for I felt a cold draft of air upon my legs . . . and I saw Warrington and Welbourne look down also, with shocked expressions, at their own legs. Our trowsers were in place but, strange to tell, I could not believe the evidence of my own eyes, and I think could not have believed it at that moment if my life had depended on it. It was like that familiar nightmare of being naked in a public place, and I had a peculiarly intense consciousness that my legs were as disgustingly white as the belly of a fish — a thought that had never struck me before. Welbourne, tugging his coat down, could not have been more disconcerted if he had been the king in the fairy tale after the child had cried out, "But he's not wearing any clothes"; and even Warrington, who has been in some preposterous scrapes without losing countenance, was blushing like a schoolgirl.

The God from the Machine stepped back into it. The opening healed, as quickly and quietly as it had opened, leaving no visible scar, and the great bubble floated away from the ground. It rose up past the roofs of the houses and drifted away into the sky, taking with it that tinkling and whistling music of the spheres. It dwindled, became again a glittering mote in the dark blue iris . . . and was gone, leaving us stranded in the mean back yard.

The three of us looked about at each other with a wild surmise. I noticed that the sensation of being bare-legged was fading, that I could feel again the touch of the fabric about my limbs.

We might have thought it all a dream . . . except that the body of Captain Selkirk lay on the gritty flagstones. Tiny, pale flames were licking and eating at the sooty breast of his grey surtout. Warrington stepped forward and, bending, beat them out with the palms of his hands.

Warrington came to see me the next day.

"The police don't believe us, you know, Pen," he said, seating himself at my bedside — for I still had not quite recovered from the Visitation.

I told him I had known they would not. "Who could believe that

lightning could strike a man on such a clear summer day, without a cloud in the sky?" — for lightning had been our explanation of Selkirk's death. "But what can they do? No other explanation is even half as plausible. And, besides, Warrington, there are reports in *The Times* here" (touching one of the papers strewn on the bed) "that people had seen a curious form of lightning or fireworks in the district."

"Yes, that lightning must have been visible for quite a distance . . . for it caught *Their* eye. But you know," he went on, taking another drag or two of his pipe, "that's not why the police are dropping the investigation. It seems that our friend Welbourne is better named than we thought. I can say no more of that at present, not even to you, Pen, for I have been sworn to silence, but . . ." And I noticed that some sort of struggle was going on in Warrington's face, a struggle that he hid as best he could with his hand and pipe. ". . . But perhaps I can tell you this much: his standing in the world is such that the police are rather disinclined to pursue an investigation that might embarrass his Family. That's Family with a capital F." The struggle was won by a smile, a very rowdy smile. "Master Shallow," he said, "I believe you owe me ten guineas."

I was silent for some moments. "There was a time," I said, "oh, how long ago! Can it truly have been only yesterday? — There was a time when that news would have floored me. Rubbing elbows with so exalted a personage! But now I have been knocked through the floor; I am in the cellar. I shall no longer be proud of dining with a duke or a bishop, or even with . . . yes, even with Her. I am afraid, my dear fellow, that I have rather bored you by bragging of such things. Good Lord; it is *I* who have been the Prince of Snobs! But, no more! I am a worldly sort of fellow, Warrington, you know that; but I see now that the world is a much bigger place than I had thought — indeed, I see that there are more worlds than this one, some (without being absolutely divine, perhaps) higher than this one. The glimpse I have had of that," I said, glancing about at my sick-chamber, "has knocked me off my feet, rather. But, never mind. I am sure I will get on my feet again and, in time, will recover my old perspective. What do you think?"

"I am sure you will," said Warrington, with a quieter smile.



BLUE FOX AND WEREWOLF

by Eric G. Iverson

art: George Barr



Eric G. Iverson informs us that he is only pseudonymously Scandinavian, reserving his real name for academic publications. He studied Byzantine history in college, which means, "naturally enough," that he pays his bills as a technical writer, doing English translations of bureaucratese and other strange dialects. He has published two fantasy novels and has had short stories published in Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine, Universe 10, and Fantasy Book. He is married, and lives in southern California. He reports that he plays chess and bridge "with a cheerful disregard for the carnage on either side."

The maiden that the evil wizard Mebodes had imprisoned in a castle in the center of the Great Wood was said to be beautiful, but Clever Rolf did not go to rescue her because of that. There was also supposed to be a treasure in the castle, but Clever Rolf did not care about that either. He made plenty of silver *kets*, and even the odd gold one, on his own as the town scribe, writing letters for those who could not do it for themselves and keeping accounts for the baron, three taverns, and the local sporting-house (though the baron did not know about that).

In fact, the maiden in the center of the Great Wood had precious few would-be rescuers. Thanks to Mebodes, there were werewolves in the Great Wood.

None of this would have had anything to do with Clever Rolf if he had not broken one of his own rules: he drank too much at the Blue Fox, the best (that is, the biggest and noisiest) of the three taverns he worked for. He was not a fanatic about rules, you must understand, and broke this one every couple of moons. And why not? Along with his *kets*, part of his pay came in the form of free bitter beer, free ale, free porter, free stout. . . . Clever Rolf was still a long way from thirty, but he had to look sideways round his belly to see if his stockings matched.

As usual, the Blue Fox was packed, and Clever Rolf had to share his favorite table with a knight. He had nothing against most knights — they were professionals with an eye for the main chance, even as was he — but this one was like something out of a bad romance. He was tall, muscular, and handsome in a fatuous sort of way, with bright blue eyes and blond hair that hung almost to his shoulders behind and was bobbed straight across his forehead. His name was Ogier. "Sir Ogier," he said.

He had come to town, he declared grandly (he had been drinking too), on his way to save the fair Viviane. For a moment the name meant nothing to Clever Rolf, but then he turned to stare at Sir Ogier. "Not the wench in the middle of the Great Wood?"

"The very same," the knight replied, striking a dramatic pose.

Sober, Clever Rolf would have let Sir Ogier go his way; he was a great believer in letting everyone work out his own life as he saw fit, however idiotic that might be. But the porter sloshing through him had left him maudlin, and he laid a warning hand on the knight's arm. "The Great Wood's full of werewolves," he said. "They'll kill you, and you can't kill them."

"Can I not?" Sir Ogier said. He rose angrily, clapping a hand to the hilt of his sword. In truth, he looked every inch (and there were a great many inches to look at) a hero. "Can I not, fat little man?" he repeated.

"Sit, sit," Clever Rolf urged; craning his neck back to look at the knight was making him dizzy. "You don't know what you're talking about, Sir Ogier, meaning no disrespect — by your accent I can tell you're not from hereabouts. Why, for all your thews, against a savage warg you'd have no

more hope than I."

Then the knight did a really unforgiveable thing. He was still standing; now he let his voice, used to roaring through the battlefield din, fill the Blue Fox's taproom. "Hear me, townsmen!" he boomed, and abrupt silence fell. He hauled Clever Rolf to his feet with effortless strength. "This worm, this niggling, this puling clerk has dared liken himself to me, and boasts that he" — this last was delivered with a fine aristocratic sneer — "would stand as good a chance as I to cross your Great Wood and win the lovely Viviane for himself."

"But — " Clever Rolf squeaked in horror. His beginning protest was drowned in infancy by a great flood of cheers. Not all of them were kindly meant; there were, it cannot be denied, more than a few folk who envied Clever Rolf for his cleverness — or for his success.

"But — " he tried again. This time Sir Ogier spun him around so they faced each other. The knight said, "Sirrah, I leave at dawn," and stamped out of the tavern.

"'At dawn,'" Clever Rolf said bitterly, "He would be the one to leave at dawn." As he led his mule toward Sir Ogier, who was waiting impatiently atop a huge black destrier, the plump scribe wished he were dead, or at least unconscious. His bowels were loose, his stomach sour, and his head throbbed like a stubbed toe. The taste in his mouth is better left undescribed. He made the mistake of glancing toward the rising sun, then looked away, wincing.

Sir Ogier, for all his carousing, was disgustingly fit. He gave Clever Rolf a curt dip of his head. "You're here, at least," he said.

"Oh, aye, I'm here," Clever Rolf echoed in a hollow voice. So was most of the town, all jammed together to see the two unlikely competitors off — and whether Clever Rolf would show. Had it not been for that, he never would have. But if he ever intended to hold his head up again, he had to go through with it. Not, he thought, that he was likely to have a head to hold up after a trip through (or, all too probably, just *into*) the Great Wood.

The betting among the townsfolk was brisk. No one was betting on Clever Rolf; had there been any way to come back and collect, he would have bet against himself. But enough people thought Sir Ogier would do what he had set out on to make the odds against him no worse than three-to-two.

"To glory!" the knight cried, brandishing his longsword and digging spurs into his charger's flank. The beast whinnied fiercely and reared, striking out with its great iron-shod hooves so that the spectators scrambled back in alarm. Sir Ogier fought his mount under control, then, with a final wave, trotted east toward the deep green of the Great Wood a mile or so away. More slowly, Clever Rolf followed.

By the time the scribe reached the edge of the Wood, Sir Ogier was far

in front of him. That suited Clever Rolf down to the ground; he wanted no company on what would likely be his last journey, least of all the knight's. Arrogant, touchy, interfering son of a frowsy slut, the scribe thought. He consoled himself by inventing gorgeous curses and calling them down on Sir Ogier's brave, empty head.

For a while he took no more notice of the cool, dim quiet of the Great Wood than that it was soothing to his hangover. As the day wore on, though, the silence and darkness began to take on a sinister cast. He found himself straining to hear anything but the lazy clop of his mule's hooves, and straining in vain. And when the mule trod the cushiony moss that grew ever more thickly the deeper he went into the Wood, there was no sound at all.

Worse even than that were the shadows. They hung like black curtains from every tree, every branch, every leaf; and when he saw them out of the corner of his eye they always seemed to be creeping toward him, regardless of the direction of the sun. It was probably some trick of Mebodes's to keep people away, but he could not see why the wizard bothered. The thought of werewolves did the job quite well enough.

He took stock of what he carried on his belt: flint and steel, a knife that might be good for paring fingernails but not much else, and a nicely heavy pouch — ah yes, he thought vaguely, I did collect from the Blue Fox last night, didn't I? "Huzzah," he said, to hear the sound of his own voice. Except for the miserable little knife, he had no weapons, nor skill in them. Learning swordplay could cost a scribe, or anyone but a knight, his thumbs.

On the off chance, he pawed through the mule's saddlebags. There was half a stale loaf of bread and a couple of dried apples from who knew when, but nothing that appeared immediately lethal. He searched again, with the same disheartening result. After that there was nothing to do but think and worry as the mule plodded along.

He smacked the purse into his palm. Maybe, just maybe, he could hit a warg over the head with it and then use his knife while the beast was stunned. And maybe I'll grow roots and turn into a rosebush, too, he thought. But he was hard-pressed for any better scheme.

The shadows grew longer and blacker. He started to look for an open space to camp in; but the Great Wood, while it grudgingly allowed the game track down which he rode, only yielded to one clearing: Viviane's. At last, with almost all the light gone, he gave up and tethered his mule to a tree beside a tiny cold stream. He pulled off twigs and small branches and tried to start a fire, but the wood did not seem to want to catch. He finally coaxed a pale, reluctant fire into being; but the dark leaves and deep-brown tree trunks drank up its light, leaving little to see by.

He sipped from the creek, ate one of the apples and most of the bread, and leaned back against a tree. He fed the campfire whenever it tried to

die, sang snatches of song, and cursed Sir Ogier all over again: anything to stay awake. He was sure he would not get up come morning if he fell asleep in the Great Wood.

The mule sensed danger before he did. It rolled its eyes until the whites showed; its long ears stood up in fright. It tried to bolt, but Clever Rolf's tie held, and it stood trembling at the end of its rope as the werewolf padded into the scribe's circle of light.

Even without the Great Wood's reputation, he would have known it was no natural beast. It advanced with chilling deliberation, a pitiless wisdom in its eyes as it took the measure of the camp. In the firelight, those eyes glowed red as fresh-spilled blood.

Clever Rolf fumbled at his belt for the pouch. "Go away, I'm warning you," he said, and could not keep a wobble from his voice.

The wolf licked its chops and sidled forward. It laughed doggily, tongue lolling out. It was sure it had nothing to fear from this soft dumpling of a man, whose terror it could smell.

"Get away!" Clever Rolf cried again. He hurled a thick silver *ket* at the beast. The coin smacked it square in its sensitive nose.

The werewolf went back on its haunches, yipping in unexpected pain and indignation. It knew all about silver weapons, and knew it was fast enough to tear the throat from anyone who tried to use them. But how was it supposed to deal with someone who would not let it get close? Clever Rolf was not playing fair.

Maybe the direct approach was still best. Snarling in earnest now, the warg sprang at the scribe, foam-dripping jaws agape.

He shouted himself, and flung a whole handful of silver at it. A *ket* struck just above its eye; the flesh smoked, as if coming to flame. Four more coins landed in its mouth — and it swallowed one as it frantically shook its head, trying to shake the burning silverpieces away.

It bayed in anguish, thrashing on the ground as the *ket* seared it from inside. There were answering howls from the forest, as if its fellow wargs understood its pain. The scribe kept pelting it with coins; whenever one hit, it would whip its head around and snap at the place that stung. At last the warg could stand no more. Still howling, it staggered to its feet and fled into the woods, tail between its legs.

Laughing and crying at the same time in sheer relief, Clever Rolf spent the next hour on his hands and knees, gathering up as many of his *kets* as he could find. He could not be sure another werewolf would not come — and besides, he thought as he tucked another coin back into his pouch, money was money.

Later that night, somewhere ahead of him in the woods, he heard screams. They did not last long. He shook his head sadly. "Poor fool," he said, and settled down to wait again. He was lucky; no more wolves found his camp that night.

The next day he was so hungry he felt like cropping grass with his mule, and so sleepy he could hardly stay aboard it. But late in the afternoon he found the clearing in which Viviane's castle stood. She smothered him in kisses, and cooked him a supper big enough for three. He ate every bit of it.

Mebodes's treasure turned out to be mostly brass, and Viviane was not half so beautiful as rumor outside the Great Wood claimed. She was not even a maiden, as he found out later that night. Not only that, she talked too much, and her voice was loud and shrill. "Stifle it, my dear," he told her sweetly, "or old Mebodes can keep you, for all of me."

She did, too. He was not surprised — was he not Clever Rolf? After vanquishing a werewolf, he was not about to be bested by a shrew. ¶

RECOMBINANT ROBBY

Born in the lab,
forest of glass tubing and yellow fluid streams,
Recombinant Robby is a study in apathy.
His eyes blink regular as clock hands
jumping up the minutes.
His facial muscles are clipped on the wrong places.
His voice is the hum of electric outlets;
syllables spaced even as railroad ties.
Pain he tolerates like halitosis.
Pleasure is muted like a distant foghorn.
Problems belong to some other universe;
his pockets all have black holes.
Yet sometimes,
special synesthetic times,
fear will jerk him rigid as a politician's bones;
or the look of a compassionate woman
will spread like chain lightning,
melting through his steel and copper plumbing.

— Robert Frazier

THE OBSERVATORY

by George H. Scithers

In our last two Observatories, we've told you about the people in our Philadelphia and our Lake Geneva offices, and what they do. Now it's time to tell you about where we're going and how we hope to get there.

Our immediate goal is to increase the circulation of *Amazing™ Science Fiction Stories*. As we write this, newsstand sales are about 15,000 copies per issue. Direct subscription sales are less than 1,500 copies per issue. Our closest competitors, *Analog Science Fiction* and *Isaac Asimov's Science Fiction Magazine*, each have newsstand sales of about 20,000 to 40,000 copies per issue; and each has subscription sales of about 50,000 to 60,000 copies per issue.

Realistically, newsstand sales will be the most difficult to increase, since we're already reaching perhaps a third of the traditional science-fiction-magazine newsstand market. Conventional advertising is expensive, especially when we're trying to reach a small percentage of the population and then to persuade those people to buy the magazine — essentially on impulse — at their local newsstands. Subscription sales have the greater potential for an immediate increase — and not just by converting newsstand buyers to subscribers. We are already working on several projects to get potential readers to subscribe, and when we find the one that's the most effective, we'll concentrate our efforts on that one. We *should* be able to increase subscribers by a factor of twenty or so, as we *must* in order to have the magazine meet its expenses and earn its keep.

We're still holding our cover price at \$1.50 (in Canada: \$1.95), although the other digest-sized science-fiction magazines have raised theirs to \$1.75. Eventually, we'll have to raise our price too — not to "meet the competition," but to pay our bills. We will hold off as long as our publisher will let us keep the present price.

We have on hand an Inquestor Universe story by Somtow Sucharitkul and a fantasy by him set in the aftermath of the Trojan War. We have two long stories by Avram Davidson which tell of Dr. Eszterhazy's early adventures in the Triune Empire. We have a remarkable underwater adventure by Robert Silverberg . . . and many more excellent stories. Robert Bloch sent us a memoir of his early contact with this magazine, back when it was edited and published in Chicago. Howard Browne, a long-time editor of the magazine, sent us another. And Ben Bova sent us an essay on N.A.S.A. at age 25 (N.A.S.A.'s age, not Mr. Bova's). And in a few months we will begin serializing Fred Pohl's third and last Heechee novel, which completes the trilogy that began with *Gateway* and continued with *Beyond the Blue Event Horizon*. We're trying to make good on our new slogan, "The best in science fiction — again!"

We'd like to hear from you on the way we've re-arranged the Contents page to separate Departments, Fiction, and Fact. We're trying a typographical change in Discussions and Book Reviews this time: is it less distracting to give you ragged-right edges to the columns of type while preserving even spacing between words, or is it less distracting to give you even-right margins (justified typesetting) at the cost of an occasional squeezed or stretched line of type? We're also thinking of making some changes in the headings for our departments; your comments and suggestions are welcome!

An embarrassing announcement: the whole numbers given in our March 1983 Observatory are off by two, an error that was caught by George R. Morgan and then confirmed by Hal Hall. This issue should be (and is so marked on the Contents page) whole number 512. Last issue should have been marked as whole number 511, and so on. There is still a discrepancy between our volume number (currently volume 57) and our year of publication (having completed 57 years, we are now in our 58th year). This discrepancy came from a two-year, 13-issue volume back in 1935 and 1936. Rather than make any more sudden changes, we'll let things stand as they are for a while; maybe we can bring the year of publication and the volume number together when we increase our frequency to monthly.

We've been — well, uh — amazed to discover that more people have bought our small how-to-write booklet, *Constructing Sciencefiction & Fantasy*, than currently subscribe to the magazine. This apparently means that almost 10% of our readers would like to write SF or fantasy — or at least, would like to read a bit about how it's done. It also means that we have the potential for many more subscriptions than we now have — and we need new subscribers, as well as regular newsstand buyers, to survive!





DEEP SONG

by Reginald Bretnor
art: Artifact

In Spain, as in most other countries, there was only one spaceport where Far Outer ships were allowed to land. It was at Granada, situated on the *vega*, the Andalusian plain that invests the city to the west; and it was there that Earth nostalgia — that sudden yearning for the sights and sounds and scents of Earth — hit Juan Salvatierra. Ten days had passed since *Glamorgan* had emerged from Gilpin's Space following a six-month voyage into infinity. She had loaded all the supplies she needed, paying a king's ransom to the customs officials who swarmed over her, in duties, in outright bribes. Traders had come to her, and museum functionaries, and academic xenologists who never dared travel more than a stone's throw from Earth, to bargain for everything strange and beautiful, for everything of value, for gems and life-forms — the few that were admissible — and the artifacts of beings too primitive to be called men, or too unfathomably sophisticated to be understood by them. They haggled over specimens and photographs, over computer records of scientific measurements, over the recorded sounds of flying things which were not birds and living creatures utterly unclassifiable in Terran terms. Day after day, they bargained and they bought, while Colin Cullinane, *Glamorgan*'s captain, listened to them patiently and held his ground until the ship's needs were satisfied, he and Maggie Tarshish, his shipboard wife, and Juan Salvatierra, his nuclear engineer. There were other crew members who took part, but those three bore the brunt of it: Cullinane massive and in early middleage, looking like the younger Winston Churchill; red-headed Maggie lithe and vivid and always laughing — a cover, Juan knew, for her keen intelligence and immense practicality; and Juan himself, in his early thirties, pale, black-haired, almost exaggeratedly aristocratic in manner and bearing, speaking a Spanish so perfect that no one, even in Castile, had ever guessed he was an Argentine. He had been something of a scholar, then a sportsman, fencer, polo player, car racer, until the day seven years before when the world first heard of Saul Gilpin's star-drive and he realized what adventures life suddenly was offering him. In less than two years, he had qualified himself to take full charge of a ship's nukepak.

The last curator left the ship, the last trader, the last reluctant excise man; and, as the lock sealed itself behind them, Cullinane said, "Well, Johnny, that's it. We've all the trade beads we're going to get. They diddled us as usual, but there's a lot more where it came from, and *they* can't get at it except through us. There's nothing more to hold us here." He saw the expression on Juan's face. "Is there?"

"My friend —" Juan hesitated. "I — I wish to go into the city. For a few hours only. You remember when we were here three years ago? There are things I'd like to see again."

Maggie Tarshish laughed, but gently. "Juanito, was it Carola?"

Carola had been a very brief affair. She had been with them for one

voyage. Then suddenly, like a fledgling nun on the point of taking final vows, she had discovered she had no vocation for the Far Reaches and had left the ship at a new colony within the fifty-light-years-of-Earth safe zone.

"Perhaps," Juan answered, coloring very slightly, even though he knew that it was not Carola who called to him but Earth and Granada, not the modern industrial city with its stinks and noises, but its ancient heart, the Alhambra and the Alcázar, the gardens of the Generalife, the Sacromonte, and the city's people, those who had neither feared nor shunned him when he first had come there. And there had been one unforgettable café.

"We could stay a few more hours, couldn't we, Colin?" said Maggie. "But won't Johnny be taking something of a chance if the gossip's true and the IPP's been making as much headway here as they say it has? You know how hostile they are to us."

"I suppose," replied *Glamorgan*'s captain slowly, "but they haven't really taken over yet. He'll probably be all right if he'll just watch his step. He knows how it's been in every country where the Individualist People's Party has come to power." His face mirrored his disgust. "They confine us to our spaceports as tightly as the feudal Japanese confined Dutch traders to Deshima — no sightseeing, no fraternizing with the natives. Well, Johnny, go ahead and take a look at Spain while you can. But have a care, and try to get back" — he chuckled — "by daybreak."

Juan smiled his thanks to both of them, pretending not to see Maggie's worried little frown. Then, in his cabin, he changed into a white linen suit, a gray silk shirt, a gray, broad-brimmed Andalusian hat — now very much in fashion — and of course the small gold pin, the mathematical symbol for infinity that told everyone what he was. All nations insisted that Far Outers wear it, and they did so willingly — it prevented much embarrassment.

He left the ship, and stood there a moment. There were less than half a dozen vessels down, all of them showing clearly that they had originally been designed as Earthside submarines of various sizes: one lumbering tanker, a long, sleek ship that must have been born into someone's navy, and three smaller ones, either plankton harvesters or, like *Glamorgan*, built for exploration and salvage missions. None of them showed any signs of their immense journeyings, for there was nothing — absolutely nothing — in Gilpin's Space that could affect them, not physically.

He turned; walked slowly to the gate; waved to the fat guard idling there, more interested in Far Outers' generosity than in their comings and goings; and picked a cab, a Fiat steamer, the cleanest of the three waiting outside the gate. It took him to Granada, and the rest of the afternoon he played the tourist, wandering through the older quarters of the city, wandering the courts and great halls and lovely arches of the

Alhambra and the Alcázar, letting his memory be his guide and mentor, his memory of the innumerable stories of Moorish Spain his proud, hawk-nosed grandfather had told him. No one approached him; once or twice, a girl appeared about to speak, saw his lapel button and at once looked away. He was used to that. For the moment, he was content with his Moorish ghosts.

The afternoon went swiftly, and only when the shadows lengthened and a cool breeze spoke of the fall of night did he leave and find his way to a restaurant he remembered, not far away, in an ancient building itself a humble part of Spain's history.

It was an excellent restaurant, more French than Spanish, more cosmopolitan than French, lighted by extravagant chandeliers in that 19th-century revival now so popular. Between its crystallized tablecloths, quiet waiters moved in traditional black, politely and efficiently. At the door, the headwaiter was summoned. His eyes narrowed as he appraised Juan's shoes, his clothing, his lapel pin.

"A table," Juan said shortly. "For one only. A *good* table, where I can see the world."

The man looked him in the face. Instinct took over; his whole manner changed. He did not descend into servility, and his newfound courtesy was all the more apparent because of it. "Si, señor," he said. "Indeed yes. I have the very table for you, as fine as any on our floor. I myself will check your hat. Please follow me."

The table stood by itself in a small alcove, and from it the entire restaurant was visible. The headwaiter seated him, beckoning to a member of his staff. "Alberto here will be your waiter, señor."

Smiling, Juan ordered sherry. "I will leave the choice to your discretion," he said.

The headwaiter bowed, and brought it personally.

Juan settled back, relaxing. He told Alberto that he could bring the menu later. Then, over his glass, he eyed the people already there. Most were Spanish, and any who happened to be foreigners certainly were not ordinary tourists — but then this was not a tourist restaurant. He watched the well-dressed men, the jeweled women, the old, the young, the stern, the beautiful — he saw them all against a mental background of Gilpin's Space and the multitude of worlds to which it was the key. His thoughts wandered between Granada and the Far Reaches, between the worlds he had already seen and the infinity of worlds as yet unvisited, between the women at the tables surrounding him and the women he had known. He knew that later, after he had had his dinner, he would return to that café he could not forget, but there was no use going there until the night was truly launched. He sipped and watched, the minutes passing like an untroubled stream.

He drifted with it. It took him moments to realize that the headwaiter was again at his elbow and had spoken to him.

"Your pardon, señor." There was awe in the headwaiter's voice. "I — I have a message for you. Behold! There at the far corner table, that lady with the old gentleman, the tall one? Señor, do you know who she *is*?" He leaned forward, whispered as though revealing a high State secret. "She is Madame Nita Marcellin!"

Juan looked across the room, and recognized her instantly, from her photographs and from the two occasions when he had heard her on the stage. Replying, he found he had to discipline his voice.

"And her message?" he asked.

"Señor, she wishes to know if you would care to join her and her companion for dinner. She would like very much to have your company and, she said that I should tell you, your conversation."

In the past, he had encountered the idly curious, the pestiferous, thirsting for tales of fear and wonder, eager to be horrified. But she — no, she could not be one of these. No one who had ever heard her voice could have believed it of her.

"Thank you," Juan told the man gravely. "I will come." He put a consolatory tip on the table for Alberto. "Perhaps you'd care to bring my sherry?"

Then, the headwaiter following him, he made his way between the clustered tables to the one at which Nita Marcellin was seated, watching him.

There he stopped. The man with her had already risen to his feet. Juan bowed. "I am Juan Salvatierra y Barbón," he said. He saw gray eyebrows lift a millimeter, and smiled. "Not *Borbón*. Not the same name as the king's. My family claims no relationship."

She introduced them then. Her companion, hard-featured, gaunt, was Pablo Ugartechea the composer, long an expatriate in France and Italy. Juan knew his operas, wildly experimental, as though he was searching desperately for something musical long lost and never found again. He shook his hand. Then, for the first time, he really looked at her — and suddenly he and she were utterly alone. Granada was no longer there. The Earth had vanished. Even Gilpin's Space and all its distances had never been.

She was not tall, but she was statuesque. Her face was delicately sculptured, its nostrils slightly arched and sensitive. Her mouth was strong and passionate, her eyes shadowed hyacinths. Her gown was one Queen Alexandra might have worn, high collared, with purfled sleeves, a dream spun of silk and ivory and Brussels lace; and Juan, standing there, suddenly saw how her hair, unpinned, set free abruptly from its graceful coils, would come cascading down, a flow of dark, molten gold, over her naked shoulders. The thought coursed through him, burning in his loins.

She looked at him. She thought: *Velasquez could have painted you, yes, yes. But there's more to you than that — you are all fire and ice! Don Juan? Perhaps, but you're not at all like the Don Juan of whom I sing. No, I think not.*

He looked at her, and thought: *I've seen you. I've listened to your voice. And now so much more is being revealed. You were your marvelous voice, but that was all. And now —*

Differently, behind him, the headwaiter coughed, and he realized that his chair was being held for him. His memory sent him his grandfather's deep voice, "Hold, my Juan! Gather your reins!" And with an effort he regained control, seated himself. But he could not quite relinquish his contact with her eyes.

"You honor me," he said, fingering his pin. "Most people avoid us."

She laughed, gently, lightly. "I know," she said. "You make most of us uncomfortable. Do you remember, in *Kubla Khan?* You do speak English?"

He nodded, and she began to quote:

And all should cry, "Beware! Beware!"

His flashing eyes, his floating hair!

Weave a circle round him thrice,

And close your eyes with holy dread,

For he on honey-dew hath fed,

And drunk the milk of Paradise.

"It is something like that, isn't it?"

"Something like that, yes," he replied very seriously. "Like that, but different. Shall I tell you of it?"

She leaned toward him, softly touched his hand. "Please, after a little while, after we have known each other a little longer. I want to hear about it from you, and so does Señor Ugartechea especially. It's not just curiosity — our reasons are extremely serious. But first, about yourself — you are a Spaniard?"

"I? I was an Argentine."

"You use the *past tense?*"

"Naturally. I am now a Far Outer, as you know. There is a difference, and that is part of it." He smiled at her. "Shall we say it is the milk of Paradise?"

She did not pick him up on it, not then, but changed the subject to Granada, and how had he spent his day?, and had he ever been there before? And presently Juan was telling her about his early life, and his omnivorous reading, and how he still toyed with classical guitar and still was always disappointed because he could not coax it to obey him like an epée, a good horse, a racing car.

Waiters took their orders, and the conversation flowed easily back and forth. Pablo Ugartechea spoke quickly, often in monosyllables, and only

when what he had to say was to the point. Juan could feel the tension in him, as though every muscle and nerve and tendon in his powerful body had been too tightly drawn, over-tuned. At first he wondered whether he himself could be the cause of it, whether Ugartechea was disturbed by what so obviously had happened between him and Nita Marcellin at the first meeting of their eyes; then he realized that, no, the composer's unconcealed devotion to her was purely paternal and artistic, and that the tension was an intrinsic part of him that made him and his music what they were.

At first, he hardly noticed it when the conversation changed its course and he himself began to tell of Gilpin's Space.

"We hear so much about the Far Reaches," Nita Marcellin had said, "and it all sounds *wrong*. We're told that only the specially trained officers they turn out at the Space Academies can pilot ships even within the safe zone, that the Far Reaches drive men mad, that there are beings there who imperil all mankind; and always there is the implication that those of you who can traverse those reaches, immune to all their dangers, are — well, how shall I say it? — if you're not witches, you're at least bewitched."

Ugartechea's keen eyes swept the adjoining tables. "Let us speak very softly," he said. "This is no longer the Spain we once knew — not even the Spain of three years ago. Now the IPP, that Individualist People's Party, gains strength even here — the party which, using the name of individualism, seeks to destroy every true individualist. Look at what they have done to America, to Great Britain, to France and Germany, Australia!"

"Somehow," said Juan slowly, "I always thought Spain would be immune."

"The Spanish people are," Ugartechea answered bitterly, "but now the IPP is penetrating on high levels, using the remnants of the old Falange, the Communists who so admire Breck Duggan, that leader of the IPP, and criminals, and the disaffected, and the corrupt. It is whispered that they have almost taken over control of the Guardia Civil, and you know what that will mean. These people are your enemies, my star-traveling friend — yes, and mine. They do not want us to know what really happens in your Far Reaches."

"Very well," Juan said, keeping his voice low, "I shall try to tell you. Yes, there is danger there — but most of that danger we men carry in ourselves. Do you believe in telepathy? Do you wonder why, here on Earth, contemplatives of all religions have always sought remote, uninhabited places for their hermitages, their monasteries? It is because all men are naturally telepathic, open to the thoughts of others, to their desires and hatreds and agonies and terrors. We have blanked our minds to them in self-defense, just as in a great city, unconsciously, we shut out

its ever-present roar. But in Gilpin's Space, and especially in the Far Reaches, it becomes more and more difficult to close our listening minds to the voices of the Universe — and I can assure you that the Universe has many voices infinitely louder, infinitely more penetrating than our own."

Nita Marcellin looked at him wide-eyed. "What kind of voices are they?" she asked.

"Voices? That was a euphemism. The Universe teems with life-forms we can not imagine, some on planets we never could approach except through Gilpin's Space, circling stars deadly to us, others alive in more tenuous environments, in gas clouds, perhaps even *as* such clouds. But all of them — no matter how absolutely alien — share one thing with us: they have the power to suffer and to cause suffering, to yearn, to mourn, to rave against each other and the gods, to hate and die. And some also have the gift of love and joy, of an elation so sublime that to deny them entry is an agony. Imagine waking in the night sharing the torment of a sentient being trapped and abandoned in a cold so absolute that it *knows* its inmost essence must eventually be frozen, the soul itself, and which yet cannot lose consciousness and die. Imagine waking to thoughts and thought-forms as dark and terrifying as vast, unknown birds of prey diving upon one out of utter darkness."

"But some of you" — Ugartechea frowned — "some of you not only manage to survive, but to remain well balanced, sane. How?"

"I think that most of us must have been safely telepathic in childhood, with those who loved us. My grandfather and I were so accustomed to exchanging our unspoken thoughts that we never were surprised by it. I think this taught me, without knowing it, to distinguish my thoughts from those of others. Most people simply don't dare to be telepathic because as children their minds have been invaded by rage, terror, cruelty, bitter jealousy — by thoughts unspeakable, insane thoughts. And these have come as if they were their own, and so were doubly horrifying. How can *I* be thinking anything like *this*? Such people cannot say, 'This fear, this horror, this terrible ecstasy was never mine. It is not part of me. I shall ignore it. I shall let it pass.'

Far-fetched, all this? thought Nita Marcellin. *Yet I believe you — Besides, what other explanations have made sense?* "And do these entities, these voices, ever try to communicate with you? To question you? To tell you things?"

"They seem completely unaware that we exist," Juan told her. "Perhaps we are receivers only, not transmitters — eavesdroppers, Peeping Toms."

Suddenly she shivered. "Oh, no! Why, I'd feel like an unseen ghost, crying into a deaf infinity. I have had nightmares like that, of being in an enormous hall with multitudes of people — people who do not see me, who do not hear me, who will not let me prove that I'm real! Is it indeed

like that? If it is, thank God I'll never have to feel it!"

Juan shrugged. "Most of us seldom think about it. I know that no entity has ever tried to communicate with me. Nor have I met anyone who claimed to have had such an experience. Of course, among us there are stories — very much, I think, like the stories sailors used to tell when our little world was as mysterious as the Universe — vague stories no one can pin down, of monsters and sirens and enchantments, the myths men still make up when they've had ten too many, the myths your governments encourage to keep people out of Gilpin's Space."

"Perhaps those myths are *true*."

He smiled wryly. "Perhaps. There've been many ships vanish in the Far Reaches, and as yet we've hardly touched the vastnesses. Anything's possible."

"Even that — " Again she shivered. "Even to be attacked in a hostile Universe would be less awful than to feel that one was *haunting* it."

Ugartechea leaned forward intently, anxiously. "Now I must ask a question we have not yet asked, to me by far the most important one of all, and to Madame Marcellin as well. Even if these beings have no awareness of us, even if they actually refuse to notice our existence, do they have music? Do they sing? Do their melodies reach you across the distances? That, señor, is what we most would like to know."

Of course! Juan thought. He was enough of a musician to realize that these two literally lived for music. "Nothing we've heard, or heard of, or experienced," he said regretfully, "has even reminded us of music. But remember, I do not know whether we really do *hear* anything of this. We wake to what we take to be screams of agony or paecans of joy; but it's the *emotions* that we really feel, that stab us, that terrify us, that make us think, occasionally, that we've been touched by angels."

"And all this," Nita whispered, "without their knowing that you exist."

"Not knowing, or perhaps not caring," Juan answered. "We just don't know. Remember, we *have* met beings on other worlds, where we've touched down; and they at least have been aware of us. But the songs of whales and dolphins, our fellow creatures on this Earth, are still so alien that we can't understand them, semantically or musically — and the beings of other worlds are far, far more alien. That's true even of the few — shall I say races? — whom we've already met. Some of them have arts, but none I've heard of have anything remotely resembling music as we know it — no, not so much as a tomtom or a pan-pipe. But then we're sure it's not the beings we've met who are responsible for the thoughts that strike us out of Gilpin's Space. They simply lack the power."

Ugartechea sighed. "Then what sort of music could such power produce?" he wondered.

"Who knows? In any case, we would have no way of recording it,

except in memory, or written down by those of us versed in musical notation." He saw their disappointment. "But why is it so important? What if intelligences so different do have their own symphonies and folk-songs, their own operas?"

Nita answered him. "It is because both of us, Pablo here and I myself, feel that the mainstream of music here on Earth has reached a point of irretrievable decay, that there is no source from which it can refresh itself, as it has so often in the past. Where Pablo and I do not agree" — she put a hand over Ugartechea's, affectionately — "is in the solution to the problem. He has tried to find it by rebelling, not only against decadence but against all tradition. But those who in the past have really achieved a revitalization have not rebelled against their heritage. They have enriched it by finding new wells to drink from, usually in the spontaneous creativity of minstrels, something existing only in rich cultures which have cherished it for generations." Her voice was low, impassioned. "Think of the wretched noises which, for more than forty years, have been displacing melody — our so-called 'youth music.' Can the rebellion of children's minds in adult bodies produce anything but noise? Especially when so many of those minds are half-destroyed by drugs? Especially when both drugs and din have sometimes been manipulated by powers-that-be as instruments of coercion and control? All they have done is to contribute to their own decadence and to that of music's mainstream!"

"I agree!" Ugartechea cried. "Nita, Nita! I agree completely. But we must try — even if we can find no rationale for our experiments in the entire lexicon of musicology. Why? Because what else *can* we do?" He turned to Juan. "Have you heard of Francisco Rodriguez, the *gitano* whom they called El Murciano? He had no formal training, none at all — yet from the age of five he displayed his virtuosity on the guitar. Glinka, the great Russian, spent hours listening to him improvise accompaniments to dances, one after another, inexhaustibly, all fresh, all dazzling. Then he would hurry to his piano and try to recreate them, and weep because he was unable to. So Spanish Gypsy music — and the music of other Gypsies east and west — helped to refresh what was then the European mainstream, then and later, by influencing Liszt and the pianist Rubinstein and Rimsky-Korsakov, and so many more. But all that is gone! I let Nita persuade me that at least the *cante jondo*, the Deep Song, of our Spanish Gypsies, could be still alive, with all its sensitivity to loss and loneliness, passion and tragedy, rage and death. And what have we found? Only its rotting skeleton, dressed in gaudy rags stolen from such noble traditions as punk-rock, its guitars electronically distorted, its passion reduced to crude obscenity. In Sevilla, here in Granada, everywhere! And our colleagues here have shown us nothing better, nothing!"

"Forgive me, señor," Juan said. "But how close are you to your colleagues here in Spain?"

Ugartechea frowned. "How close? I have seen little of my country for many years, but I believe I have kept in touch. And yet — "

"And yet they have shown you nothing a tourist might not find, or at best a visiting professor of music or its history?"

"That is true."

"Then, with all respect, may I suggest that the degeneracies of which you speak threaten no one more than the true *aficionado*, whether he be a musician or a poet, a bullfighter or a dentist. When one's sacred wells are imperilled and running dry, one guards them with great care."

"Do you mean," asked Nita Marcellin, "That there still are true *cantaores*, men who have preserved the pure tradition?"

"Certainly there are, though I myself know of only one. Three years ago, there was a *gitano*, Don Manuel Porrua. He was old even then, but he was vital, hardy. I would expect him to be still alive, and probably still singing."

"Could you find him for us? Could you take us to him?"

"If the café where he was singing still exists, he would be there, I think, until the day he died."

"And you can find it?"

"Certainly. That is where I had planned to go tonight. We will have to follow the narrow, winding streets up from the river, the Darro, into the Albacín — the way of García Lorca in his *Poema Del Cante Jondo* — you recall? But we should not go until much later, at least not until ten, better eleven."

"You yourself are an *aficionado*, are you not?" There was excitement in her voice and in her eyes.

"I am not sure, Madame. The true *aficionado* must have his own *duende*, his own demon, like the dancer, the guitarist, the *cantaor*."

"But you have told us you yourself play the guitar."

"I am an amateur. I have pursued my *duende*, but I have yet to catch him." He smiled ruefully. "Or he has not caught me."

"But you will do this for us? You will take us to this Don Manuel?"

His eyes engaged hers. "For you, Madame — " Quickly, he caught himself. "Of course I will. For you and for your friend. Let us hope the old man is still there."

She looked at the composer. "If he is, we may be up almost until morning. Perhaps we ought to take our bags back to the hotel?"

"Your bags?" said Juan. "Surely you had not planned to leave tonight?"

"No, no," she answered. "But, as I told you, we had given up, so we packed our bags and stowed them in Pablo's car, leaving nothing in our rooms but overnight things and clothes for travelling. We'd planned a

really early start tomorrow morning."

Ugartechea shook his head. "Going back to the hotel would be just one more trip. Let's leave our luggage where it is. If the *cantaor* is no longer there, we can still get an early start. If he is, then tomorrow we can extend our stay, and the three of us can return to hear him again."

"I will not be here," Juan said regretfully. "I will be in Gilpin's Space. But you will then know where to go, and Don Manuel will have recognized you as true *aficionados*. You will no longer need me."

"You *must* leave tomorrow?" asked Nita Marcellin, with a small frown.

"I must," Juan answered. *Oh, God!* he thought, his eyes on her. *I wish I didn't.* Then he told himself sternly not to dream foolish dreams.

Nothing is so relaxing as an excellent dinner perfectly served by waiters who know their business — who, like Japanese stagehands, can appear and disappear and do everything necessary without intruding on such important matters as the progress of a play, or eating and drinking and conversation. They spoke of music and musicians, of operatic stages and trends and fashions; they spoke of Spain's Gypsies and of the changes technology had brought to their way of life; they spiced their talk with anecdotes of events and people, the great, the mean, the mediocre, the picturesque. They did not mention Gilpin's Space. Neither Nita nor Ugartechea asked Juan any further questions.

Only once during the evening was the spell broken. The headwaiter, bowing and scraping now, brought in a party of three men, three women. Two of the men were in full evening dress, the third in a general's uniform; the women were ever so slightly over-decorated. Ugartechea looked at them, and instantly looked away again. His expression darkened. Lowering his voice, he said, "Listen! Do not stare at them, at those people who just came in. But the officer is the Army's Deputy Chief of Staff, with authority over all those police functions the military still retain; I have seen his picture in the papers, and no one could mistake that brushed moustache, that haughtiness. But that is unimportant. When you glance at them, you'll see that the larger of the two civilians is wearing the gold-and-diamond I, which means he is important — *very* important — in the IPP. Even now, I am surprised the general would be seen with him in public. I do not like it."

"Is it as bad as that?"

"It is worse, señor. Just as in America, where it began, just as everywhere it's spread, enemies of the IPP have disappeared mysteriously; some have had fatal accidents; others have been brought to trial and convicted, on charges everyone knows are completely false. Soon Spain will go the way of Italy, where they took power last year." Ugartechea's mouth twisted. "Did you know that the IPP have formed their own International? And that they and the Russians seem to have no

disagreements, none at all? The IPP serves the great conglomerates, the cartels, who seek power through money; the cold men in the Kremlin simply seek power more directly. Like calls to like."

Juan, moved by the anger and anguish in his voice, let his own glance flicker toward the general and his party, whom the headwaiter had just seated. The gold-and-diamond I was larger than such things usually are, vulgarly so.

Nita smiled at him. "Let us forget the IPP. Let us pretend that they do not exist."

Then she picked up the conversation where it had been interrupted, and presently the general and his party and the menace they implied were no more than shadows in the background. Liqueurs were served, and coffee, and it was time to go.

The headwaiter brought Nita Marcellin her cloak, long, gray, and silken; and she permitted Juan to fasten the clasp that closed it at her throat. Then they walked a block to Ugartechea's car, a Citroën, like all the newer cars steam-driven, silent and odorless; and Nita insisted that Juan sit in front. "You must," she told him. "You are the guest of honor. Besides, it will be easier for you to show the way."

Ugartechea drove expertly, decisively; and they went on talking until they turned off to cross the Darro, the culvert-buried river, and thread the narrow streets into the Albacin.

It was almost eleven o'clock, and here there were few cars, but Ugartechea drove very slowly, passing ancient houses, passing the sites of ancient houses mercilessly razed to make way for high-rise warrens. "How things have changed," he commented, "in only twenty years. How men have changed them!"

To Juan the streets were still familiar, and soon he recognized the one he wanted. He said, "I think we'd better leave the car here, where there's light and the street's a little wider, and walk. It's only a few meters to our street — perhaps I ought to say 'our alley,' because that's really all it is — then a few more."

Ugartechea parked the car and locked it. There was no music. There were no sounds of revelry. They passed one or two pedestrians, ghosting in and out of shadows. Heavily, the ancient city brooded over them. They came to their alley's mouth, and that was all it was, but halfway down to where it obviously dead-ended, a dusty light-globe over an inconspicuous doorway marked one house out from its sleeping neighbors.

"That's it," Juan told them. "It doesn't look like much, now does it? But that doesn't matter to the *aficionados*, not in these times."

The door was closed. He rang a pull-bell, and they heard it jangling just inside. Half a minute passed. The door opened. An aproned waiter, a bent and aged Spaniard, regarded them. Suddenly he saw Juan. He threw the door open with a smile, a deep bow. "Welcome!" he cried out. "Señor

Salvatierra. Ah, we have not forgotten you, no, never! You shall be our guests here, you and your good friends!"

They entered. The room, well lighted, was much larger than might have been expected, with bare whitewashed walls and a deal floor. At one end, it held a stage, now empty of dancers or musicians, adorned with paper festoons that looked as though they were an inheritance from the 1920s, its only other ornament an enormous vase of fresh red roses on a wicker pedestal.

Nita Marcellin looked around. The tables were oil-cloth covered, and everything was neat and clean. In one corner of the room an old man sat alone. Obviously he was a Gypsy. His nose was hooked; his skin was like ancient wrinkled leather; his powerful, knotted hands, resting on the table-top, held a short white stick. He was brooding over the half-full glass of golden Manzanilla in front of him — brooding, thought Nita, just as the city itself brooded.

"Here," Juan told her, "they still serve their sherry — and it is excellent — on wrought iron *cañeras*, each holding at least ten glasses. That is the way it was always done, but where else now?"

There were nine or ten *aficionados* at tables surrounding, but not immediately next to, the old man's. Some were poorly dressed, their hands and faces showing the marks of hazard and hard work; others just as clearly were professional, a lawyer perhaps, a professor. With them were two women, one young and very graceful, the other passing middleage but still with a dancer's flair in the way she tossed her head and shrugged her shoulders. Three of the men were *gitanos*; and, as Juan and his party entered, one of them, seated alone at a table near the old man's, leaped to his feet abruptly.

"*Hola!*" he called out, his voice a robust baritone. "It is Señor Salvatierra! Ay, Don Juan! So you have returned from the stars, you star-Gypsy? Yes, you're one of us, one of the *Cales* — and you've come back just as I told Don Manuel you would."

He was tall, high-cheekboned, thin-lipped, a man all of sinew and lean muscle, wearing a jacket and a scarf loosely tied. Limping slightly, he came to Juan where he stood halfway across the floor and embraced him. "Ah, you young scoundrel!" he exclaimed. "When you last were here, you played Paco's old guitar, and promised that next time you came you'd bring your own." He turned to the old waiter. "Didn't he, Paco?" *Si, es verdad,*" the waiter said, bobbing his head.

The tall Gypsy released Juan. "Look who's here!" he called to the *cantaor* and to the room at large. "Our own Juan Salvatierra, back with us again! . . . Come, you are here to listen to El Maestro, to Don Manuel, so you must greet him first."

He led them to the old man's table. Don Manuel had risen to his feet. He looked at Juan. "So," he said, "have you found no music in the stars?

No alegrías? No soleas? No siguiriyas?"

"Alas," Juan answered, "none at all. Always I must return here to Granada. And now Raúl Heredia chides me for having forgotten my guitar."

Three or four of the others there who remembered him had come up, including the older woman, and he made the introductions, first to Don Manuel, then to Heredia.

The *cantaor* smiled, inclined his head. "The Señora Marcellin needs no introduction," he said. "I have listened to her *Norma*."

There were murmurs of assent; there were others there who knew her voice. When Juan presented Pablo Ugartechea, they welcomed him, but with reserve, a little dubiously; some of them knew his music and did not find it to their taste.

"And my friend Raúl Heredia," Juan said, "is an artist also. He is the greatest matador in all Andalusia."

Heredia laughed. "That, Señor Juan, was all in the past. Since we last met, unfortunately I encountered the greatest bull, not just in Andalusia, but in all of Spain."

"Ah, but it was not your fault," protested the elder of the women, the dancer. "Your skill did not fail. It was the fault of that stupid picador, who could not control his wretched horse!"

"María, it does not matter," Heredia said. "It was very sad, because I was not ready to retire, no indeed! But perhaps El Maestro here will make a song about it and sing it to us, so that it will not weigh too heavily on my spirit" — he laughed again — "if he has not drowned his poor *duendecillo* in his glass. Eh, Maestro?"

Don Manuel ignored him.

"Well," said Heredia, shepherding them to the next table, "we will sit here and wait for the poor little demon to come up again, and you shall be my guests. Paco, hey Paco!"

The waiter, anticipating him, had already come up with a *cañera* of glasses, and Heredia seated them; and then they talked and drank, the talk sometimes changing direction to include the others there. They spoke of Spain's music; anecdotes flew back and forth across the room; occasionally someone would prod the *cantaor* with a teasing, good-natured gibe.

And Don Manuel simply sat there, hunching slightly forward, as though hypnotized by the golden wine in the glass before him.

"Do not be impatient," Juan said to Nita Marcellin. "El duende comes only in its own good time."

"I know," she answered. "Long ago, I learned to wait."

They waited, while cigarette smoke wreathed the room and Paco moved back and forth. Half an hour went by, an hour. The minutes now stretched out endlessly.

Abruptly, then, things changed. All that happened was that Don

Manuel, without moving, seemed to tense. Watching him, Nita saw beads of sweat appear on his forehead. Suddenly, there was electricity in the air, absolute silence in the room.

With his white stick, Don Manuel struck the table once. Then in a harsh, deep, slightly quavering voice, he sang.

His first song was a *soleá*, a song of loneliness, of abandonment, of love's fragility betrayed and shattered; and it seemed as though he had to fight each injured word, force it out, bite it off savagely, varying the pitch between notes, using strange small intervals in the scale. It was a song of pain intensely felt, and at first it seemed to dominate the *cantaor*, as though ultimately it might vanquish him. Then suddenly, as it reached its climax in an almost overwhelming crescendo of emotion, Juan realized that Don Manuel was in complete command; his voice had gained power; there was no tremor in it now.

The song had ended, but it still held its listeners in its grasp. Then, scarcely giving them time to catch a breath, Don Manuel broke into a *siguiriyá gitana*, a song of jealousy, revenge, knives flashing in the starlight, of blood staining paving-stones and the boots of the Guardia Civil, of pursuit and again of death. Incredibly, his voice grew even more forceful as he sang; the veins on his forehead throbbed; the muscles of his neck stood out like cables tightly stretched; his hooded eyes appeared to be turned inward, as though he must see nothing but his music. Incredibly, the song reached a climax even more shattering than before.

Juan looked at Nita Marcellin. She was leaning slightly forward, clutching the table's edge, her nostrils dilated, swept up completely by what she had just heard. He looked at Ugartechea, sitting there twisting his glass around, completely unaware that he was weeping.

So that is what it's like when it is real! Ugartechea thought. *These songs of individual suffering, of men in their inalienable aloneness, accepting their cruel destinies, destruction, death itself — never allowing themselves to be destroyed as men, not spiritually — accepting, never surrendering, and always with complete awareness. These are no whining protests, drug-induced frenzies offering false escapes, the brutal anesthesia of percussive noise. Garcia Sanchez called canti jondo 'the drama of humanity in chains.'* Perhaps he should have said, '*the greatness of humanity in chains.*'

Raúl Heredia looked at him with compassion in his eyes. "Ah," he said, "now I believe you understand. This is how we exorcise our devils, how hard lives are made endurable, how we survive to meet whatever comes."

And Nita, overhearing him, thought how simply he had stated the principle of the Aristotelian catharsis, the principle behind Greek tragedy, which the world had all but forgotten in its devotion to the ever-more-abrasive, the ever-more-sensational, the ever-more-destructive of the spirit.

Then Don Manuel sang again, and for an hour and more song followed

song. Sometimes he kept time with his stick. Occasionally, he stamped a foot. That was his sole accompaniment. And with each song, the room's tension mounted, and with each song's climax it broke to mount again.

He sang like a man possessed — which, thought Juan, who himself had wooed the *duende* without success, in a sense he was. When in the middle of a *siguiriya*, the doorbell jangled, he paid no heed to it. The time was one-fifteen. The *aficionados* frowned without taking their eyes off Don Manuel. Paco, clucking his annoyance, scuttled off to the door; and Juan heard the sounds of an altercation, Paco politely protesting, foreign voices demanding peremptorily to be admitted.

Suddenly, under the table, the iron fingers of Heredia's sword-hand seized Juan's knee. "Quickly! Take off that symbol you are wearing! Hide it. Now. Instantly!"

Responding to his urgency, Juan did as he was bidden. He put the lapel pin in his pocket, turned to Heredia with a half-uttered *why?*

"Look what has come in," Heredia said, carefully not looking at the newcomers, whom Paco was trying to lead to a far table. There were four of them, three men, a woman. The couple was German, the man thick and heavy-jawed and grossly overweight, the woman broad and strident. One of the men, by his clothing, looked to be a Britisher, coarse, red-faced, possibly a Mersey-side labor leader. The fourth member of the party



quite clearly was a Spaniard, a small man, sallow, vulpine, with little, bloodshot eyes. Each of the men wore the I of the IPP, and that worn by the Englishman, like the one Juan had seen in the restaurant, was of gold, oversized and diamond-studded. All of them had been drinking heavily.

"I do not like it," Heredia whispered. "The small one is Jaime Villas, a guttersnipe, a Guardia Civil informer. The Englishman is named Hodgson, and people are very much afraid of him. The other two I do not know. But always, lately, when such people come, there can be trouble. They hate everyone who is different. They hate *gitanos*. They hate the *afición* and our music. They hate and fear you star-wanderers perhaps most of all. And now they have much influence in Spain; some say they are already in control. They are very dangerous. Let us pray that they remain quiet and soon go away."

Juan heard Hodgson's voice, rough, peremptory. "Tell 'im we want to sit near the old bugger that's doing the singing," he told the Spaniard, who passed it on; and reluctantly, glancing an apology at Nita Marcellin, Paco led them to the adjoining table. They sat, noisily. They demanded brandy. Paco brought them a bottle of Fundador.

Don Manuel ignored them completely. His voice did not falter. He went on singing as though there had been no interruption; and the others in the room, after a glance or two, carefully looked away. But the atmosphere had changed. Now there was a new, sick tension in the air.

For another half-hour, the *cantaor* continued, song still following song, each seemingly more poignant than the last. The four intruders, drinking heavily, talking loudly, seemed deliberately trying to pick a quarrel. "So that's the kind of howling they go in for!" grunted Hodgson once when Don Manuel paused between songs to sip his *manzanilla*. "No wonder they're so bloody backward. Well, we'll soon be teaching them a lesson, won't we, Jimmy?" Laughing uproariously, he slapped the small Spaniard on the back. Then all four joined in the merriment.

The *aficionados* stirred. Juan could feel their suppressed anger. But no word was said.

Finally, then, Don Manuel stamped his foot, cried out his opening, "*Aie-e!*!" and began a *siguiriya* so fraught with passion, so charged with the tragic sense of life and death, that the room, momentarily, was washed clean of the four of them.

"*Listen!*" whispered Heredia excitedly. "This is one he has never sung before. Part of it perhaps was in his mind. The rest he is making here, now, he and his *duende*. Who else could do this, and so perfectly?"

The *siguiriya* rose to new heights, and Don Manuel held it there — and, at that point, Hodgson took a black device out of his coat pocket, five inches by four, half an inch thick, and set it on the table in front of him.

What in God's name is the fool doing? thought Juan, recognizing the thing as a holo flattie, the very acme of portable electronic nuisances.

"Well, it's damn near two o'clock!" Hodgson announced. "Breck Duggan's goin' on the air. Jimmy, tell the old bastard he can scrap the yowling."

The small Spaniard, looking a little apprehensive, did as he was told. Neither Don Manuel nor the *aficionados* paid any attention whatsoever.

"All right, then," said Hodgson, "we'll just drown the bleeder out!" And he switched the flattie on.

Instantly, between the tables in the center of the room, a hologram appeared, a hologram of more than human stature. It was Breck Duggan, the leader of America's IPP and now of the IPP International, crude, earthy, charismatic, infinitely sly Breck Duggan.

"I am Breck Duggan!" boomed the hologram. "I greet you, each and every one of all you True Individualists, wherever you may be! I — "

Hodgson was sitting just behind Nita Marcellin. Now, ash-pale, her lips suddenly bloodless, she turned to him. "Please, Señor," she said. "Please do not do this thing."

"Shut yer yawp, slut!" growled Hodgson.

Juan gathered himself. He felt Raúl Heredia, next to him, suddenly move his chair back a fraction of an inch.

Then Nita Marcellin was on her feet. No longer pale, her eyes flashing fire, she turned, seized the holo flattie, crushed it underfoot.

And Breck Duggan's image died there on the floor and vanished.

It took Hodgson a moment to react. Then, yelling out, "You shit bitch!" he hit her in the face, a great, roundhouse blow that sent her reeling into Juan, now on his feet.

There was a fraction of a second of total silence. Then Raúl Heredia moved. He did not limp. He moved like a charging leopard, soundlessly, seeming to cross the few feet that separated him from Hodgson instantaneously. Hodgson looked around, his mouth opening. Then Heredia's knife was into him, placed as accurately as he had ever placed his matador's sword. Hodgson coughed. He sagged. Blood dribbled from his lips. Slowly, even as a bull will in the ring, he fell to his knees, collapsed, and died.

Juan, holding Nita, saw the small Spaniard reach for a shoulder-holster, saw Ugartechea try to stop him — and then another knife flashed through the air into the Spaniard's throat. Someone among the *aficionados* had been both accurate and swift to act.

The German's wife was on her feet, clutching her husband and howling like a wounded animal. Only Don Manuel and Heredia appeared calm. Heredia turned Hodgson over and retrieved his knife. Very deliberately, he gave the writhing Jaime the *coup-de-grace*. "A good riddance," he told Juan. "But now we have no time. We must move!"

The room had almost emptied. Grimly impassive the *cantaor* stood looking at the dead men on the floor. Only one or two of the others were

still there.

"But where?" Juan asked.

"Away from here," Heredia told him. "At once! You have a car?"

Ugartechea nodded.

"Good. We can talk after we are in it. There is a back door here. Come!"

The German, in shock, simply stood there and stared at them while his wife, no longer howling, began to scream.

Heredia picked up Nita's long, gray, silken cloak; handed it to Juan, who wrapped it round her shoulders. He silenced Ugartechea's stuttering questions. "Come, Don Manuel," he told the *cantaor*. "We shall take you with us." He herded all of them to a door hidden behind a screen near the stage, through the dark passage it opened into, and finally into an alley so narrow that the buildings lining it almost hugged each other. "Hurry!" was all he said.

They obeyed, and Juan, his arm around Nita Marcellin, found himself listening for the roar of engines, the flash of lights, the scream of sirens. When they reached Ugartechea's car, he asked again, "Where shall we go?"

"Just go!" Heredia said.

They got in, Juan riding with Don Manuel and Nita in the back seat, Heredia in front with Ugartechea. The car started instantly.

"Not too fast," Heredia warned. "We must not be conspicuous. But not too slowly."

Nervously, they began to thread their way out of the Albaicin.

"You have asked me where to go," Heredia said. "Señora Marcellin, and you also, señores, and I myself — there is now nowhere in Spain that we can go, not and live our lives. These people we have quarreled with do not forgive — they do not keep their power by forgiving. If we remain here, one by one we shall disappear. And this is true not of Spain only, but of all Europe — yes, and of America, of the entire world. That is what we must now face."

"My God!" Nita Marcellin exclaimed. "And it is *my* fault. If I had not —"

Heredia interrupted her. "It is not your fault, Señora. It is the fault of men like that Villas. But the fact remains — there is still no place for us. We can drive our friend here to his ship — if God is good and the Guardia Civil slow to act — and he at least can vanish in the stars. But for us —" He shrugged. "Who knows?"

"Have these people *really* become so powerful?" asked Juan, still incredulous, "that nowhere can you escape from their revenge?"

Ugartechea answered him. "There is no doubt of it. It has happened to so many, everywhere. In one way or another, they will destroy us. If we live, our lives will no longer be worth living. Do you think Madame

Marcellin will ever be permitted on another major operatic stage after what has happened here? Or that anyone of note will dare perform any music that I write? Or even that Don Manuel will remain free or long survive? No, he will be condemned simply because it was he who sang."

"You speak the truth," Don Manuel said; and Juan heard Nita gasp.

The night was warmer now, the air almost cloying. To their listening ears, sounds seemed to come sluggishly, just as the car seemed scarcely to be moving. They drove in silence through the city, passing two Civil Guard cars going in the opposite direction, who paid them no attention.

"Let us hope," Heredia said, "that they have been slow to find you, to check the records of foreigners for your hotel, to get your license number. It will depend largely on the Germans, on how much they heard, and how much they remember. Let us hope they were too drunk to notice anything important. The Guardia Civil will need time to round up even Paco, let alone the *aficionados*, who will do their best to tell them nothing."

The city thinned, slowly, too slowly.

There seemed to be no more to say.

It was Juan who suddenly broke that anxious silence. He had been thinking, not of himself, not of whether he might indeed reach his ship in time, but of Nita Marcellin, of her bruised face, and of the probable fate ahead of her.

"There is one place where we would all be safe," he said.

Heredia laughed. "You joke, Señor Juan. Where is this sanctuary?"

Juan hesitated for a moment only. "With me," he told them.

"W-with you?" Nita whispered. "You — you mean to — to fly into this Gilpin's Space where we will be — like — like ghosts? No, no — " She almost sobbed the words. "I could not."

"My dear," said Ugartechea very softly. "We have no alternative. Besides, Señor Juan and his friends always return to Earth. One voyage, perhaps two, and we may find the world again changed."

She simply shook her head.

"No, you'll not be like a ghost," Juan told her. "In my ship you will be very real, and very much alive, and among true friends."

"Are you — are you sure they'll welcome us?" Ugartechea asked.

"We Far Outers are close to one another — very close. We have to be. Yes, I am sure."

Without taking his eyes from the road ahead, Ugartechea nodded. Almost inaudibly, he said, "Yes, I will come."

Don Manuel chuckled. "I too! It is time there was a true *gitano bravío*, a true wild gypsy, in the skies. Perhaps I will become a constellation!"

"What shall I do?" asked Nita Marcellin. "Oh, Pablo, tell me — tell me what to do!"

"Come with us," Ugartechea answered, and he added softly, almost regretfully, "I am sure Don Juan will be glad that you are there." And

Juan felt the same thrill course through him as he had at their first meeting — how long ago?

Raul Heredia said nothing.

The spaceport was now straight ahead of them. Its chain link fence glinted in the starlight, the ships looming like huge stranded whales behind it.

"Sing as we pass the guard," Juan told them. "Sing as if you've had ten too many — anything, something now popular."

Ugartechea slowed the car. A blinking guard, still obviously half asleep, stuck his head out of the guardhouse window. Heredia and the *cantaor* were singing raucously, doing their best to imitate a wornout jukebox.

Juan reached out. "Ah, my friends, what a party! Only in Spain do they know how people should enjoy themselves. And it's not over yet! We've a lot more to drink aboard the ship." He shook the guard's hand, left half a fistful of banknotes in it. "Will you join us?"

"Alas!" answered the guard ruefully, "I cannot leave my post." He felt the money. "But I thank you, Señor. Enjoy yourself. I shall envy you."

He waved them on, and drew back into his shell to count his gains.

Juan pointed out *Glamorgan*, dark and silent, a single light gleaming in one of the ports of her control tower, and Ugartechea brought the car to a halt opposite the entry lock. Juan saw that though the lock was of course closed, Colin Cullinane had left the gangway out, anticipating his return.

All of them got out, stood there in the still night; then, in the distance, they heard a siren screaming. They looked up at the stars.

"I — I've never seen men killed before," said Nita Marcellin, as though talking to herself. "It — it was horrible. And now — now *this*. Now I'll be leaving even that reality behind."

"Señora" — Heredia's voice was low and strained — "you have seen men killed many times. Isn't that what so much grand opera is all about? And you shall be leaving nothing behind — after tonight, for us, there's nothing left. Listen!" The siren was still screaming. "In the car you said that out in space you'd be a ghost. That voice is telling us that soon we'll all be ghosts. Come!" Gently but urgently he took her arm, handed her to Juan. "Go with him. Go *now*."

Unresistingly, as though in shock, she let Juan lead her up the gangway.

"Our luggage!" exclaimed Ugartechea.

"Get it!" Heredia said. "But hurry!"

He and the composer opened the car's trunk, took out four bags.

"Follow me," Juan told them, knowing that by this time the ship's sensors would have awakened either Cullinane or someone else who could activate the lock. It opened as he reached the top, and Cullinane was standing there in his bathrobe, Maggie Tarshish at his elbow, one or two

others just behind.

"What's happened?" Cullinane asked.

"Trouble. Bad trouble. With the IPP, and probably with the Guardia Civil too. I've brought guests whom I could not abandon to them."

"Guests for how long?"

"For at least this voyage. We have room for them, and I can promise you that each will be an asset to the ship."

Maggie looked closely at Nita Marcellin, at Ugartechea, at old Don Manuel.

"What's your feeling, Meg?" Cullinane asked.

"I feel Johnny's right, Colin. And has he — have I — ever made a mistake in judging people for the ship?"

"Welcome aboard," Cullinane said, smiling, standing aside.

They entered, all but Raúl Heredia. He had helped Ugartechea with the bags. He had turned back down the gangway. Now he stood there looking up at them.

"Hurry, Raúl!"

He shook his head. "No, Señor Juan. No, if Señor Ugartechea will toss down the keys to his car, I will stay here for one last *corrida* with the Guardia Civil."

"Raúl, *no!*!" Juan shouted. "There's been enough of death!"

"Señor, you do not understand. This is how my song must end. My wife is dead, my two sons married and far away." He shrugged. "I am not for the stars. Perhaps, when you are far far out in endless space, Don Manuel will make a *siguiriyá* remembering me. *Todo esta dicho* — everything has been said. Now hurry! Go!"

Ugartechea tossed down the keys. The siren's scream rose, louder, louder. Without another word, Heredia got into the car, started the engine, gunned it. As the lock closed ponderously, shutting out the world, they saw the car charge through the gate and make a screaming turn and disappear.

"We'll take her up," said Cullinane.

Three minutes later, they were in Gilpin's Space.

A fortnight and a hundred light-years away, Cullinane admitted that Juan and Maggie had been right. "They fit in, Johnny. They fit in perfectly," he said. "It's hard enough to find just one, and here you came roaring in with three. There's been no friction. Fred and Jessie Langer like them; so do Tom Jason and Erica Hosokawa and Betty Kaplan; Jake Haas and Emily almost worship them — probably because now all their musical dreams are coming true. Anyhow, our balance is even better than it was before."

That balance, the frictionless meshing, of any Far Outer crew was all-important. "I'm glad," said Juan, "and relieved of course, though I

never had any real doubts about them. Now they, like all the rest of us, have experienced the intrusions, and they've not been affected. Old Don Manuel considers them a nuisance because they wake him up; but he's enjoying the adventure, the very thought of gypsying among the stars; Pablo Ugartechea feels them and tries to listen to them, seeking new inspirations; he's already trying to compose — but he doesn't allow them to disturb him. Perhaps the fact that all the rest of us are scientists or technologists of one sort or another has helped. These three are the only ones among us totally dedicated to art. The only one aboard about whom I'm at all worried is —”

He broke off.

“Is Nita?” said Cullinane gently.

Juan did not answer him.

From the time they came aboard everything she did had seemed to him to become progressively more and more somnambulistic, as though, carrying on perfectly normal activities and relationships, she still moved in a detached world of her own. He had done his utmost to introduce her to her new *milieu* and to minimize the shock of sudden separation from familiar things. He had shown her the wonder and the mystery of Gilpin's Space, where the laws of common physics did not apply and there seemed to be no limit to acceleration and velocity, where only the ghost of the Universe could be perceived, with its own ghosts of light and gravity, where ships and starfarers alike were themselves ghosts to anyone in the normal Universe, able to manifest themselves almost instantly and to disappear again as suddenly. He had shown her all this, hoping that it might balance out her strange obsession, her disquiet.

When they had passed beyond the safe zone, and when the Universe's alien minds started to push in, he had introduced her, and Ugartechea and Don Manuel, to the morning sessions in the ship's wardroom where, after breakfast, everyone exchanged dream experiences so that they could help each other to remain untouched, untroubled — for usually it was only during sleep that the intruders could get through, with their sudden strikes of almost unendurable emotion and impenetrable, amorphous thought-forms — and he had known all the while that it was not the invasion of her mind that troubled her.

Patiently, Juan had brought her into the ship's daily life, showing her the work they shared — for, though *Glamorgan* was as automated as a ship could be, there still were jobs for human beings to do — and doing everything he could to share his own experiences and the ship's, by way of holotapes and reminiscences of the planets they had visited, the beings they had encountered, the forms ordinary life had taken far from Earth.

He had watched her drawing closer to the others, to Cullinane and Maggie, and Jake and Emily Haas especially, forming her friendships — and all the while drawing further away from him, until the flame he

knew had burned within her from the moment they first saw each other — and which he was sure still burned — seemed walled off impenetrably.

He watched it happening, puzzled and deeply hurt, unable even to discuss it when Cullinane had tactfully enquired. Then, three weeks from Earth, after they had made their first unprofitable survey of a previously unknown five-planet system, having recorded what they could but without touching down, she had stumbled coming down the companionway from the control tower just as he was starting up — and, instantly, she was in his arms. He felt the flame surge through him. He felt it surge through her. And instantly she broke away from him — held him at arms' length.

"*No, Juan!*" she cried. "*No, no, no!* I know you want me. I've known it since we met. Because I want you just as badly as you want me. But Juan, if I gave myself to you, I'd not be giving myself to you at all. Here, in this terrible, peopled emptiness, I'm nothing but a ghost — and so are you. And it's been worse, worse, *worse* since those thoughts began coming in. Now, Juan, I really feel I don't exist! Only that vast emptiness is real, and the things that live in it. The Earth, the people of the Earth — they can at least know that I am here. If I gave myself to you, I would be swallowed up by Gilpin's Space — forever. Do you understand?"

And before he could reply, she had turned, sobbing, and fled down the corridor, leaving him standing there.

After that, their relations had become extremely formal, a stately pavane of politenesses. Without another word being said, they had avoided any physical contact whatsoever, as if even the touch of fore-fingers might upset the balance and plunge them irretrievably into emotional disaster.

The weeks went by, and Nita developed an amazing sensitivity, not only to alien minds, but to their effect on others, an almost uncanny ability to sense why sometimes it was so difficult for a man or woman to shake off the experience of some incomprehensible alien torment or self-torture, hunger that could not be appeased, insane elation or dark, gloating triumph, or mad mockery. She would listen. Then often, with a word or two or three, she'd evoke laughter or a long-hidden memory, and set things in perspective.

But her manner to Juan remained unchanged.

They touched down, briefly, on a planet circling a pale blue star which should have had none, a planet with an uncomfortably high gravity and frightening seismic roars and shudders, where a strangely prescient race of dead-white beings with dished faces and eyes like brass bedstead knobs and long, prehensile toes were waiting for them, standing dead still in a circle round the ship when she emerged from Gilpin's Space and became visible. They simply stood there as Cullinane and Juan went out, followed by burly Jake recording everything, and covered by the control tower's

laser turret. They made no sound, none at all. But before them they had set a mound of raw dish-faced skulls crowned by a single crude sapphire, sapphire large as a grapefruit, far bluer than their sun, scintillating there.

"What do they take us for, gods or something?" asked Jake. "Want me to tell 'em we're not in the god business?"

"They may think we're sacrifices, sent by their gods to be propitiated, then offered up," suggested Juan.

"Or possibly just tax-collectors," Cullinane said. He stepped forward, picked up the sapphire, and abruptly the entire circle backed away, nodding and twitching, expressionless, then just as suddenly broke up, scattering into the jagged black and gray rocks of their landscape.

When they made no response to every effort at communication, Cullinane carried the sapphire aboard. In the lock, they removed suits and helmets; the ship's computer, through its sensors, had informed them that neither atmosphere nor soil held any organisms dangerous to man.

Cullinane held the sapphire up for everyone to see. They looked at it and gasped. "Nice of them, wasn't it?" Cullinane remarked, admiring it. "But I'm still uneasy. They're a gruesome lot; there's something wrong with them. Maybe it's because they *knew* that we were coming — which is weird enough. Anyhow, let's get away from here."

"If they knew we were coming," Juan put in, "that means they heard us, or sensed us somehow, even in Gilpin's Space." He paused, weighing his words. "And if they could sense us, who knows who or what else might? I agree, let's get away."

He heard the apprehension in his own voice; he felt the wardroom's sudden fear and tension.

Then he looked at Nita, and saw that she alone showed no alarm. Instead, for an instant, he saw the flash of interest in her eyes — of interest and expectancy. Instantly, he knew what she was thinking: *Those myths, those spacemen's stories — can they be true?*

It frightened him.

They made two more landings, on planets of Sol-type stars. On one they found animal life only, and spent a week recording and collecting, taking only what the computer sensors declared innocuous. On the other they found a technologically advanced race who refused to display any interest in their presence, leaving them to their own devices, and going about their main business, which seemed to consist of mining and refining metals with which to make gigantic earth-moving machinery, with which to build seemingly nonfunctional megalithic walls, towers, totally empty cities, unbelievable spires. They did not refuse to communicate; they simply refused to bother about their visitors. The air was breathable; and Cullinane, after getting all opinions, decided to spend a few days exploring, recording, and gathering specimens, always

taking full precautions against attack — unnecessarily because the autochthones, tall, snouted, with Titan muscles and heavy-lidded eyes — simply ignored them even when they helped themselves to small samples of machinery. After several days, they left. "We know when we're not wanted!" Cullinane called out from the closing lock, and one said good-bye to him.

"It takes all kinds to make a Universe," he commented. "Now where do we go?"

"I thought you were determined to go out to the Probyn Cluster?" Maggie said. "It's further than we've ever been before, and it looks so promising, all those lovely fat stars so close together."

"It'll take a while." Cullinane looked at all of them. "What is your pleasure?"

"I say let's go for it!" declared Tom Jason. He was a Texan, spoke like one, looked like a rodeo rider, and was as close to being a xenologist as anyone aboard. "I'm purely tired of meeting these lowdown ET types you've been introducing us to, Cul. Let's go find better company."

There was no disagreement, and once more they settled down to the routines of voyaging. Juan's relationship with Nita did not change, and naturally the others noticed it. But as neither he nor she mentioned it, they commented only to each other.

Cullinane especially was concerned, as a captain must be, and he spoke to Ugartechea about it. "Look," he said, "Pablo, the force drawing those two together makes gravity seem feeble. Why are they hurting one another the way they are? You've noticed it; everyone's noticed it. Why?"

"Colin" — Ugartechea, troubled, hesitated for a moment — "to Nita I am like a father, an uncle. She has told me what the trouble is, or rather what she *thinks* it is. The beings whose thoughts we feel are real; but to them we're not, or at least so it seems. When she talks about feeling like a wandering ghost, she means exactly that. Try to understand. She is an artist, a performing artist, so much so that she and her audiences no longer really are separate entities — and she is not like Don Manuel, who is content with a handful of *aficionados*. She needs vast halls, huge audiences. It is not selfishness. It is simply that this is how she fulfills herself. Have you noticed what songs she sings to *us*? Always light arias from operettas, *lieder*, perhaps French or Italian art songs — never anything tremendous, from Grand Opera. She has left Grand Opera back on Earth, where all men and women everywhere can be her audience; this is her lifeline to reality. That, I know, is why she keeps Juan away, because he is a man of the Far Reaches, where those *others* dwell. She does not dare to leap into that void, to cut the lifeline."

"And what of Juan?" Cullinane asked. "Why is he so distant?"

"That is simple." Ugartechea smiled. "He loves her. He respects her. And he is a gentleman."

"I suppose you're right, but it seems a shame. Aside from that one fixation, I've never seen anyone adjust so quickly, so perfectly, to Gilpin's Space as Nita has. Look how she handles those invading thoughts, like a veteran, and better than a lot who are."

"So does Don Manuel."

"Pablo, Don Manuel is a great artist in his own right; but he's a very simple instrument compared to Nita. Isn't that so? He shrugs off those invading thoughts. She is enraged by them. That's not so good."

"She is what she is," Ugartechea answered. "Let us hope, for both her sake and Juan's, that somewhere in this wonderful and terrible Universe — perhaps on some planet far, far from our Earth — there are composers and opera houses, and vast audiences who will admit that she exists."

"I hope so too, for her sake and Juan's, but sometimes I think I'd rather stay a spook, if that's what I am to those thought-senders. Those beings from whom we got the sapphire knew we were coming, Pablo; and it still frightens me."

After that, Cullinane did not mention it again, except to Maggie in the privacy of their cabin, and then only to ease his own concern.

The ship hurtled onward, aimed at Probyn's Cluster, and life aboard continued as before. The artificial gravity generated by Saul Gilpin's drive was half Earth-normal, pleasant to live with, especially for Ugartechea and Don Manuel, who felt as though their years had dropped away. Because it was Far Outer custom never to bother anyone who wished to be alone, they all had privacy, to read, to study, to tap into the ship's libraries for holovision or recorded music or the literatures of a dozen tongues and centuries. They played games as the mood struck them; they discussed everything they had experienced, giving each other intellectual challenges; in the galley, they tried to outdo each other in culinary inventiveness. And one and all they watched Juan and Nita, hoping that something might occur to break the wall dividing them, a break in the routine, a threat of peril, anything.

Yet when the challenge and the danger came, it was one only Cullinane had anticipated.

In the control-room, Maggie had been standing watch from Earth-midnight to four A.M., and when Cullinane relieved her he discovered that the ship had veered a full three degrees off course. "What's going on, Meg?" he asked her. "Have you been diddling the computer?"

Indignantly, she retorted that she'd been doing nothing of the sort.

He showed her, and she stood there aghast, mouth open, staring incredulously. "I — I've been watching it constantly. I just don't understand it!" Her voice rose, a bit hysterically. "Colin, I'd have noticed if we veered off course! Wouldn't I?"

"Look at it," he said, sitting at the board and making the necessary correction. Then he stood again, put his arm around her, kissed her

forehead. "Go and get yourself a drink, love," he told her. "It was just one of those things."

But it was not. Less than twenty-four hours later, it occurred again, this time during Tom Jason's watch; and the next morning, during Juan's, it happened twice. For two days, he and Cullinane took turns checking the control room. They found it happening several times a day — and the watch officer never was aware that it had happened.

"Dammit, we must be doing it ourselves — the computer couldn't be!" Cullinane said. "That means something's influencing us. But, Johnny, how do we find out *what*?"

They had the answer a day later, when Nita first heard the voices.

She was lying relaxed, hovering in that curious frontier between waking and sleeping, where one begins to dream and suddenly, sometimes, one's mind's eye opens on detailed, uncannily clear scenes, places, people, situations that are at once completely familiar and completely strange. She knew this was no dream, for the voices — and she knew instinctively that they were innumerable — had hit her with the strongest emotional surge she had felt in Gilpin's Space.

She rose, put on her robe, and hurried down to Cullinane's cabin. They were awake, and Maggie let her in. "My God, Nita!" Maggie cried. "What's wrong? You're pale as death!"

Nita took the chair Cullinane provided her, and he poured her a double brandy.

She drank a little of it, shaking her head as though to clear it, and told them what she'd heard.

"They were *singing*," she told them. "And there must've been thousands of them. It was a beautiful and dreadful song, with overtones I simply can't describe. Its words, if they were words, just ran together with no real intervals, and its message was so simple — *Come to us! Come to us! Come to us!* But what gave it its horrible power was its sexuality — something that swept over me and through me, and left me feeling drained and disgusted — *and deprived*."

"*Nita, are you sure?*" Cullinane asked. "You're sure it wasn't just a dream? You did say it lasted only for a moment."

"It was no dream, Colin. I never could have dreamed that music and that message, *never*. I — I think I listened to whatever beings are responsible for our course deviations. I think they've been touching at least some of us subliminally!"

He frowned. "Where singing is concerned, I yield to your expertise, of course; and so you've convinced me that you heard just what you said you heard. The coincidence between that message and our course changes is frightening. Do you suppose something of this sort could have been behind that old Greek myth of the sirens' song? You remember, when Odysseus had himself tied to the mast?"

She shivered. "Colin, all I can say is that now I feel as though I've listened to the song black widow spiders sing to their doomed mates, if they do sing. Behind the singing, I could feel faceless horrors."

She held her glass out; and he filled it once again, making another drink for Maggie and one for himself. Though she could tell them nothing more, and they could think of no more questions to be asked, they sat and talked for a few minutes, until finally she rose. "Well," she said, "that was it, but I don't think we've heard the last of them. Even if they don't even realize that we're around, I'm sure it's that song that's making us veer off our course. Anyhow, I'd better get some sleep."

"You'll be all right?" asked Maggie. "Nita, are you sure? Would you like a sleeping pill?"

Nita hesitated. "I don't think so. I know it isn't good to suppress one's awareness of dreams or telepathic nudges, and I'd rather not unless I absolutely have to."

"Well, all right," Cullinane said. "But be sure to call us if you need us. Don't worry about waking us. That's what a captain's for."

"And a captain's woman," Maggie added, kissing her.

She left, and they looked at each other. "Colin, I'm *scared*," Maggie whispered. "I'm awfully scared."

"So am I," he answered. "I'm scared for ourselves, our people, our ship. I wish I were as sure as Nita that whoever's calling isn't actively aware of us, but anyhow I'm especially scared for her. She's much more sensitive to music — any music — than the rest of us. It's a damned shame she has to sleep alone."

"She doesn't *have* to," Maggie said. "Johnny would — "

"No" — Cullinane interrupted her — "Johnny wouldn't. Unless she lets him know she wants him to, and the trouble is she wears our old Earth and her audiences and this weird idea she has that out here she's just not real — she wears them like a chastity belt."

There were eight more involuntary course changes during the night watches, and by breakfast time Cullinane's concern for Nita had been drowned by his concern for all of them, for every time a correction had to be made, he or Juan or whoever had to make it found it more difficult to do so, as though a subtle paralysis was setting in. Besides, during the morning hours, he himself began to hear the voices and to feel their power — he and then Maggie, and as the day moved on, one by one the rest of them. All of them came to him in their fear and puzzlement.

"It's a damned mating call!" Tom Jason said. "It's a mating call to any and every living thing. If we had a ship's cat, Cul, the critter'd be climbing the walls right now, trying to get to whatever's calling. That's what I want to do — even though I can feel there's something hideous and revolting back of it. I just can't help myself!"

He spoke for all of them. Don Manuel sat, tight-lipped, and nodded. "These are devils calling us," he said. "What can we do?" Then he fell silent.

"I've never felt like this, not even as a boy!" Ugartechea said. "And at my age! What, indeed, *can* they be?"

All of them told the same story, their reactions varying only in the degree of their fear and revulsion — and in their now awakened deadly hunger.

But that hunger's only object was to possess — or to be possessed by — the owners of the voices. No man there was stimulated to want his woman, no woman to want her man.

As the day wore on, and as the voices grew ever louder and more and more insistent — sometimes a strange, lilting ululation, sometimes a screamed command, always without intervals, without a period, and always carrying that never-ceasing sexual imperative — Cullinane and Juan and Maggie did their best to soothe away signs of hysteria, of blind panic. They forced themselves to insist as much as possible on normal ship routines.

"Perhaps," Cullinane said, "we're not actually being drawn there. Perhaps, like a comet visiting the solar system, we'll just loop around their star and then go on our way."

They all knew that he was whistling in the dark. By mid-afternoon, they all knew that hours had passed since anyone had been able to correct their course, and that they were heading nowhere near Problyn's Cluster. They made themselves experiment, tapping into the ship's computer system for Earth's great music, hoping that perhaps Beethoven could drown the voices out; but against them Beethoven was powerless, Beethoven and Bach and Brahms, and every other mighty Earth-voice.

Finally, mechanically, they sat down to supper, leaving no one to stand watch because they knew that standing watch was futile. They scarcely tasted what they ate or what they drank. They finished in silence. The only sound was the chorus worming at their minds.

Then, abruptly, Don Manuel looked at all of them. "We must have wine," he said. "We must have *manzanilla*. Perhaps we can not escape the things that summon us, but we need not surrender — no, never! In my mind, I have begun a *siguiriya* to tell of it. It will not save us, but it will save our souls."

They looked at him.

"Come!" he commanded. "Bring wine!"

He stood up, picked up his short stick, moved to a chair by the wardroom's wet-bar, sat down on it. He pointed at the two pictures on the wall behind the bar. Every Far Outer ship had them; they had become icons. One showed Saul Gilpin, a smiling little man with a big nose, bigger ears, and a dun-colored squirrel-tail moustache, with his young

Chinese wife and his grown daughter Polly Esther. (Legend had it that he had been a chemist.) The other was a stylized Hopi painting of katchinas, who Gilpin — raised among the Hopi and speaking their language before he had learned English — swore had been travellers through the space he had discovered.

"We would not want Señor Gilpin to think us cowardly," declared Don Manuel. "Whatever fate we meet, we must meet with dignity, *no es verdad?* And please, if my friend Juan will bring out his guitar, I think this time I will want accompaniment."

While big Jake and Maggie brought glasses, opened bottles of fine sherry brought aboard in Spain, and served everyone, Juan went to his cabin and returned with the guitar, taking a seat in a chair next to Don Manuel. He made sure the instrument was perfectly in tune, looking at Nita at the table's corner nearest him, at the fear in her eyes and the night's dark circles under them, and his heart ached for her.

"Come!" said Don Manuel. "Let us drink to Señor Gilpin."

They drank the toast. Then, for a time, the *cantaor* brooded, staring at his glass, sipping occasionally; and the rest of them watched and waited, tasting their own sherry, trying to ignore the ever-strengthening summons out of space.

The tension mounted. They could see that Don Manuel was poised, drawn tight; his cheeks had paled; the strong cords of his neck stood out; sweat began to break out on his brow.

He stamped his foot. He brought his stick down with a sharp *crack*. And the first words of his *siguiriya* burst from him, wrested out as though against their will. His voice was harsh, biting each word off as if he had to master it; and Juan understood at once that, while he undoubtedly had the general idea of the song in mind, much of it was being extemporized.

His first verse spoke of the various destinies which had brought them there together; his second, of Raúl Heredia's courage and sacrifice; his third of the age-long cruelties of man to man. The air was infinitely sad, singing of tragedy inherited, man's simply by virtue of his being human, and it was also terrible and pitiful in its pride.

Juan picked the air up almost immediately; began his accompaniment; found that his guitar seemed to be speaking almost for itself.

The fourth verse echoed the first three, and now Don Manuel's voice was strengthening; as always, he was gaining the mastery of his art, he and his *duende*. And it was as if Juan was at once reinforcing him and being inspired to excel himself.

Nita looked at the two of them, and realized that, since the first stamping of the *cantaor*'s foot, she had scarcely drawn a breath — and found that now she had to discipline her breathing almost as though she were hastening on stage.

Verse followed verse. Don Manuel sang of all their hopes, their loves,

the Earth forever left behind, of Fate's betrayal, and of the unknown frightful destiny to which they were being drawn.

And all the while, the alien voices rose, as though to quell him.

The *siguiriyas* reached climax after climax, each so moving that it seemed impossible that the next one would exceed it; and Juan realized that it was indeed cathartic, and that whatever happened to them in the hours ahead, they were the better for it; and when the final climax came, reaching a height he would have thought unattainable, through his own tears he saw the expressions on Nita's face, on Ugartechea's, and on all the rest, as though they had indeed been freed.

Yet now something stirred deep within him. Still quivering at the power and beauty of Don Manuel's song, suddenly he understood that it was not enough, that though it defied the siren song and those who sang it, offering no surrender, still it was not a battle-hymn at all, but a paean of acceptance. And that was *not* enough. He felt his muscles tensing; he felt the blood draining from his cheeks; a wave of ice and fire swept over him — and, almost without knowing it, he struck eight chords, eight chords so powerful that even as he struck them he listened to his own playing incredulously. They echoed the burden of the *siguiriyas*, but they went beyond it. The guitar had spoken — but of acceptance, no. Don Manuel's air had been transmuted. It had become a song of pure defiance.

Instantly, then, Nita came to her feet. "Again!" she cried. "Juan, again!"

The guitar's voice rose again, and now she sang. Into it, she threw not only the wonder and the glory of her voice, but all her sharply-honed musicianship, all the sophisticated power of her training and operatic heritage, and all the force of her own unsullied sexuality. And, just as the power of Don Manuel's *cante jondo* had mounted unbelievably with every verse he sang, so now the power of the song she sang seemed to double and redouble exponentially, reaching one new crescendo after another, until the others there were compelled to join in, first Don Manuel, then Juan, then every one of them. She was extemporizing now, singing each verse alone with the guitar, repeating it so that their chorus could join her. She sang of perils man had encountered and overcome, of challenges he had met and mastered, of the spirit that had brought him from the caves of Earth out into the stars. Hers was a song of absolute defiance, a threat, a grim, unbending promise. *You shall not vanquish us!* it cried. *You shall not have us! No! We shall vanquish you!*

They were standing now, all of them, most of them weeping openly. Her challenge was repeated, again, again, again. She brought it to a final climax; bit the last note off almost as Don Manuel had done.

And then she realized that she was standing there in utter silence. In the wardroom there was not a sound. And in all their minds, the last thin shreds of the invading voices were vanishing.



Slowly, Don Manuel came forward. He knelt and kissed her hand, saying nothing.

Ugartecchea looked at her in wonder. He thought, *Perhaps, as García Sanchez said, cante jondo is the drama of humanity in chains. But this — this is the triumph of humanity unchained.*

Colin Cullinane went up to her. "God love you, Nita!" he said, voice trembling. "You — you've beaten them!"

She stood there, looking completely through him, through all of them. "I could feel them," she said, as though talking only to herself. "They — they were listening."

Without another word, she turned and left the wardroom for her cabin.

For a moment, Cullinane remained where he was, reveling in the blessed silence of his mind; then he too left. "I'm going up to get us back on course," he told them.

Don Manuel came to Juan, sat down beside him, put an arm round his shoulders. "Now," he said, "at last you know how it is when your *duende* comes to you." He paused, looking after Nita. "But she — ah, she has always known."

The room was clearing, everyone suddenly feeling the end of fear, of tension, suddenly ready for the benison of sleep. Juan followed them out, went to his cabin. Still wakeful, he undressed, wondering what had happened to all of them, wondering what had happened, musically, to

him.

He was still awake when, fifteen minutes later, there was a soft knock at his door. He raised himself up on one elbow in his bed, turned his nightlight up very slightly.

"Come in," he called.

The door opened, and Nita Marcellin walked into the room. She wore her long, gray, silken cloak. Saying nothing, she stood a moment there in front of him. She unfastened the clasp that fastened the gray cloak at her throat, let it fall to the floor. Then slowly, one by one, she removed the pins that held her hair, and set it free to come cascading down — as Juan had known it would — a flow of dark, molten gold over her naked shoulders.

Again saying nothing, she came to him in his bed. She came into his arms. "Juan! Oh, Juan!" she said. "Love me! Make love to me! We have no need of Earth. Now we shall find ten thousand thousand worlds to sing to!"

Mr. Bretnor was, for five years, chairman of the Japanese Sword Society of the United States; and though he no longer collects them he would of course love to hear from any reader who might have one to give away. His mystery novel, A Killing in Swords, drew on this area of his background. Mr. Bretnor's collection, The Schimmelhorn File, and his novel, Schimmelhorn's Gold, are recent titles from Ace Books. He has been selling SF for 35 years.

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REMAINDERED TITLES

AT BARNES & NOBLE

1. Arguments for the Existence of God

Last night on the way to a movie
I noticed that my watch had stopped.
Being already late, in all probability,
I was anxious to know the exact time,
And it wasn't possible along that stretch
Of Sixth Avenue to see the Met Life
Tower. So I tried to stop
Someone going the other direction,
But before I could say more than "Pardon me, sir,"
He gave me a nickel, and hurried on by.
"In God We Trust," a mint somewhere
Had stamped on the nickel. I reached
The movie just as the credits were starting,
And the next morning I bought another Timex.

2. History of the Theories of Rain

Every so often when the moon is full
I'll notice it, but not invariably. Or I'll encounter
Some peculiarly telling type of cloud and wonder
What to call it. Trees, flowers, birdsongs —
All languages I never learned. But I think
I can explain the rain. Put a low wide bowl
Of water atop the radiator (assuming
Its ribs allow this to be done): little by little
The water vanishes, drawn to the sky
By scientific principle. In a few days
It will rain, if not here then in another city,
Blotting the moon from sight, making the mud
That feeds the trees and flowers, and earning money
For the men who sell umbrellas
From the doorways of bankrupt stores.

— Tom Disch

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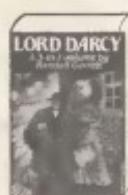
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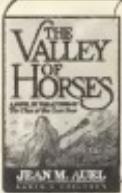
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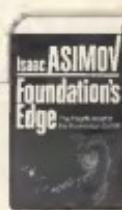
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